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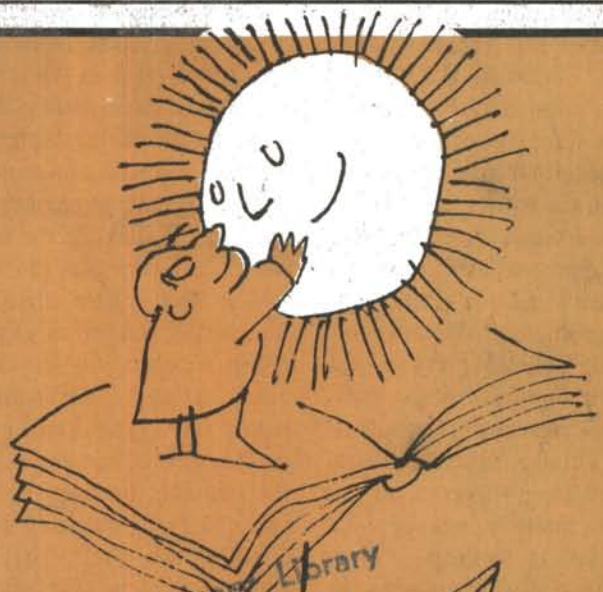

SPRING BOOKS

Whose Justice? Which Rationality?
ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

Quinn's Book
WILLIAM KENNEDY

The Yellow Wind
DAVID GROSSMAN

Anthills of the Savannah
CHINUA ACHEBE

Open Mind, Open Heart
The Mystery of Christ
THOMAS KEATING

Returning
DAN WAKEFIELD

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CORRESPONDENCE

Other side of optimism

Athens, Ga.

To the Editors: Virginia M. Bouvier's piece on contemporary Paraguay ["On the Threshold," February 12] implies that democracy is just around the corner. It is not. To be sure, Paraguayans of all classes and backgrounds are starting to talk of a post-Stroessner era, but the most common attitude I encountered in Asunción reeked of apprehension and fear, not the optimism that Ms. Bouvier cites. The actions last August of the *militantes* faction of the ruling Colorado party suggest a murky future for the average Paraguayan, one that smacks of *continuismo* or, worse yet, civil war. Church-state relations, as Bouvier suggests, are indeed bad, but as Stalin is once supposed to have remarked of the pope, "How many [military] divisions does *he* have?" Stroessner has always depended on the fact that he is, after all, a dictator who rules by force. There is little reason to assume that his successors will think—or act—differently. Prospects for change exist, but the outlook for democracy, under such polarized conditions, hardly seems propitious.

THOMAS WHIGHAM

Gored ox groans

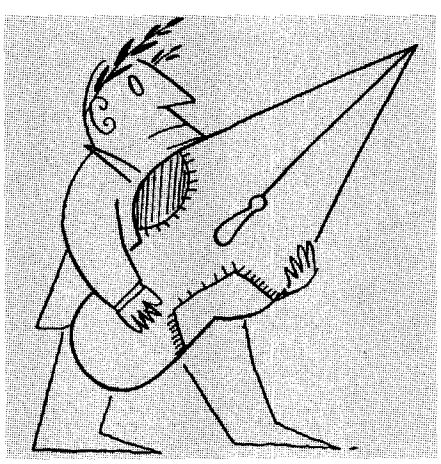
Villanova, Pa.

To the Editors: I am a longtime admirer of *Commonweal* and a somewhat shorter-time admirer of John Garvey. How then is it that my ox is gored gratuitously ["The Academy in Bloom," January 29]? For shame!

At least Mr. Garvey understands that vocational training is as old as the university itself, though he should have added doctors to his clerics and lawyers. We must plead guilty, from the beginning, to smuggling in the liberal arts as a necessary preparation to the ladder up, so ardently desired by most of our clientele and their parents. That is surely a less than perfect approach, but does a less than perfect human nature suggest it? Christ himself preached to philistines and other prostitutes.

Nor is the fact that we academics labor under badly mixed motives without its established place in the academic tradition. From the beginnings of the universities, academics have sought patronage, a career, and even a measure of security. I hope they have sometimes wanted these plebeian goodies for the benefit of the tradition of which they are the bearers, as well as for their base selves. On balance, it seems that academics, clergy, and journalists are one in the sense of pursuing a career at least a modicum higher than naked self-aggrandizement. Why then do they savage one another so often for that common humanity which no one of us is likely to outgrow? Is there some scrubberless intellectual smokestack somewhere in the Midwest which makes inevitable and fashionable carping at tenured, learned disciplines, and the surely modest perquisites attached to a life at low wages?

BERNARD J. REILLY
Professor of History
Villanova University



Our finest playwright?

Ridgewood, N.J.

To the Editors: I very much enjoyed Marian Burkhart's fine article ["Horton Foote's Many Roads Home," February 26]. In her appreciation of Foote, Ms. Burkhart has gotten at something that the critics have missed in a man who, indeed, might be our finest playwright. Beneath Foote's apparent calm and understatement, he does have a passionate concern about those dark forces that threaten our fragile humanity—forces such as the violence that Ms. Burkhart focuses upon and the ravages of time, itself another form of violence.

Like Sophocles in the choric ode from *Antigone*, Foote knows that "man's little joy is the fount of future sorrow," but he goes beyond the fatalism of the Greeks (as well as disregarding the posturing nihilism that afflicts the American theater when it tries to be serious) and quietly insists on the power of human goodness and love—a love that takes the form of an intense and all-embracing remembrance that, whether Foote is a formal Christian or not, may not be too different from prayer.

MICHAEL GALLAGHER

Tolerance or neutrality

Columbus, Ohio

To the Editors: David R. Carlin, Jr. raises an important point about ethical laxity in his March 11 article, "Creeping Neutralism." Unfortunately, I think the point is almost lost by his indiscriminate mixing of comments on ethics with re-

(Continued on page 317)

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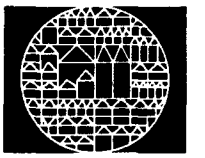

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Demon Runyon

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist has written that the Supreme Court as an institution has steadily grown in authority and public trust because of its overall performance during the two centuries of its existence (*The Supreme Court*, 1987). With the Court's abrupt decision last month to call into question its own 7 to 2 decision in the 1972 civil rights case of *Runyon v. McCrary*, and with it a decade-long series of other decisions which broadly applied civil rights statutes to individuals, that trust has been put to the test.

Having heard arguments earlier this year in a case alleging recurrent instances of racial discrimination on the job (*Patterson v. McClean Credit Union*), the Court suddenly instructed lawyers for both sides to return this fall to argue whether *Runyon* had been in error twelve years ago when it broadened the rights of individuals under what is known as Section 1981 of the U.S. Code. None of the litigants, and none of those who had offered briefs in the Patterson case—including the Reagan administration's solicitor general—had questioned the standing of *Runyon*. But Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justice White had vigorously dissented in the original *Runyon* case, and now they have been joined by the three Reagan appointees to the Court (Kennedy, Scalia, and O'Connor) in calling for the rehearing of *Runyon*.

Section 1981 of the U.S. Code is the touchstone of the *Runyon* controversy. It was first enacted as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 to insure practical enforcement of the then newly ratified Thirteenth Amendment that ended slavery. Later reenacted as part of the Enforcement Act of 1870, Section 1981 was recodified and given its present form and designation in 1874. It states in part that "All persons within the jurisdiction of the United States should have the same right...to make and enforce contracts, to sue, be parties, give evidence, and to the full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of persons and property as is enjoyed by white citizens...."

There is a vast and complex legislative history associated with Section 1981—a history which has made its original intent the subject of recurrent disagreement (*Harvard Civil Rights/Civil Liberties Law Review*, Spring 1980). No doubt, that many-faceted history will be the focus in rehearing arguments this fall, much as the Reagan administration has sought to alter the generally held interpretations of the ABM Treaty by reexamining its complex and unwieldy negotiating history.

Judicial decisions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries concerning Section 1981 applied the statute restrictively, stating that it prohibited involuntary servitude but did not cover merely private acts of racial discrimination. But in 1968, in the landmark case of *Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co.*, the Court overturned those precedents and concluded that Section 1981 was also intended to bar all *private acts* of discrimination. In 1975, in *Jones v. Railway*, the Supreme Court recognized that

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Section 1981 afforded a federal remedy against racial discrimination in *employment*. And the following year, in *Runyon v. McCrary*, the Court applied Section 1981 as a remedy to discrimination in *contracts between individuals* as well.

Over the past decade—following in the train of the civil rights era—Section 1981 has blossomed from a little-known Reconstruction-era statute into a powerful legal weapon for overcoming both private and public discrimination. Proponents argue that this is not only in keeping with the original intent of the statute, but that it is also in concert with present-day civil rights legislation. In particular, they point to Congress's override two months ago of President Reagan's veto of civil rights legislation that remedied a 1984 Supreme Court ruling limiting civil rights enforcement.

The sudden and electrifying decision of the Court's new majority to call into question such firmly established doctrine (unbidden by any party in the case) means that unsettled times may lie ahead for civil rights enforcement. There is no doubt that it is the prerogative and duty of the Supreme Court to reverse decisions—even long-standing ones of its own making—which time and new insights reveal were either incorrectly argued, erroneously decided, or subsequently falsely applied. But there must be stability as well in the Court's patterns of decision rendering, as major figures on the Court have argued. Justice Frankfurter observed that sudden turnarounds by the judiciary are a danger to the republic because they lead people to believe "that law is the expression of chance." And Justice Cardozo noted that if every past decision could be reopened in every case, "one could not lay one's own course of bricks on the secure foundation of the courses laid by others." This long-standing respect for judicial precedent, stands in marked contrast to the Rehnquist Court's sudden directive (Justice Stevens called it a "spontaneous decision") to rehear *Runyon* and thus a significant body of the Court's work over the last decade. This has rightfully evoked consternation within the Court and mystified attentive and knowledgeable outsiders.

But the real issue is not whether apparently settled questions of the law can or cannot be reexamined, modified, or overturned by a new constellation of justices. It is, rather, what changes in the political makeup of the Court determine the grounds on which crucial decisions should be reconsidered; and what constitutes the limits and tolerable costs of sudden reversals or abandonments.

Justice White and some conservatives have consistently opposed the broad application of Section 1981 to acts of private conduct. Conservatives in general resent regulations that tend to place any limit on private contracts. Some are averse to the punitive damages awarded in cases under Section 1981, while others wish to do away with the application of the statute because it extends to all businesses, even those with fewer than fifteen employees and not covered by other federal legislation. In recent years, some of those who oppose a broad reading of Section 1981 have been made uneasy by its successful application in cases concerning the inequitable sentencing of blacks and whites, and in cases of police misconduct where racism was a factor.

Congress has learned by hard experience that in the area of civil rights, legislators must assure parallel and overlapping remedies against racial discrimination if the laws are to be effective. For example, the courts have noted repeatedly the importance of Section 1981's "*full* and equal benefits clause" in assuring that the "equal protection doctrine" of the Fourteenth Amendment, as well as Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, are to be applied successfully. Thus Justice Blackmun saw fit to write in his dissent to the rehearing of *Runyon*, "that racial discrimination in certain other contexts is not actionable independently of Section 1981."

By precipitously deciding to call into question a whole range of decisions relating to racial equality, the Supreme Court—which has traditionally had a unique role in assuring the civil rights of our most aggrieved citizens—has, in the words of Justice Stevens, "inflicted a serious and unwise wound upon itself." Those words are strikingly reminiscent of Chief Justice Hughes's description of the Court's fateful judgment in the *Dred Scott* decision. We can only hope that the ramifications of the present case are both less revolutionary and less catastrophic.

During his confirmation hearings last December, Justice Kennedy, whose swing vote put into motion the directive to rehear *Runyon*, testified that he saw no reason to try to reverse the expansion of criminal defendants' rights. "Since it's established," Kennedy reassured the Senate Judiciary Committee, "it's entitled to great respect." We hope that as he and the whole Court set out to review the findings of *Runyon* and its later applications, they will do so with the utmost respect for judicial precedent while keeping in mind the needs of all our citizens. Only then will the Court continue to enjoy both its considerable authority and public trust.

What is at stake in the redeciding of *Runyon* is not only that proven antidiscriminatory remedies might no longer be so readily available to those seeking redress under them; but that society itself would perceive that the nation's commitment to achieving racial equality—wrought so painstakingly and incrementally over the last 125 years and still incomplete—has been brought to a sudden and gratuitous standstill.

ALAN PATON

Alan Paton died April 12, 1988 at his home near Durban, South Africa. His novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, published in 1947 first revealed to many Americans the human costs of South Africa's policies of racial separation. The book's publication changed Paton's own life, enabling him to resign his post as principal of a reformatory, to write full-time, and, as he put it, "to do many things that brought in less money, or indeed no money at all." But the book did not change the face of apartheid. After winning the 1948 elections, the Afrikaner National Party enforced complete separation of the races.

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Paton writes in his autobiography, *Towards the Mountain* (Scribners, 1980), of his first encounter with this new policy during a farewell party given in his honor at the reformatory: "I was full of anger, and sick at heart. I drank my white tea and then went over to the black tables....In my anger I could have spent the rest of the afternoon at the black tables, but I had white guests to consider, so I returned to them." These events, he says, "condemned me to a struggle between literature and politics that has lasted...."

Cry, the Beloved Country tells the simple story of the Reverend Stephen Kumalo in search of his son Absalom, who has disappeared in Johannesburg. The novel ends in reconciliation between Kumalo and Jarvis, the man whose son Absalom has killed; yet in the telling Paton exposes the terrible fear dividing whites from blacks, blacks from whites, in South Africa. The novel is prescient in describing the violence which so many years later has overtaken South Africa. "I have only one fear in my heart," says the priest Msimangu, "that one day when they turn to loving they will find we are turned to hating."

Paton struggled many long years in South Africa. His passport was taken from him in 1960 after a trip to Great Britain where he criticized his government's policies. He could not travel for the next ten years, but through his essays and novels he continued to speak to the rest of the world of the situation in South Africa.

Paton's pleas for integration and reconciliation proved of little avail in South Africa and his moderate position ultimately excluded him from political life. Paton's first novel, with its simple language and pervasive religious sensibility, had a far greater impact on race relations in the United States. He wrote *Cry, the Beloved Country* while on an official trip to study prisons and reformatories in Europe and the United States. His autobiography gives a moving account of the experience that led him to set down the first sentences of the book: While seated in the cathedral of Trondheim in Norway, "I was in the grip of powerful emotion, not directly to do with the cathedral and the rose window, but certainly occasioned by them. I was filled with intense homesickness, for home and wife and sons, and for my far-off country." Immediately after, he returned to his hotel room and wrote the first sentence of the book and within an hour completed its first, short chapter.

Throughout the rest of his journey, on trains and in hotel rooms, between visits to penitentiaries and attendance at conferences, Paton wrote his story. The journey through the United States, and especially the South, gave Paton a sense of black-white relations in this country which he compares and contrasts to those in South Africa in *Towards the Mountain*.

Nothing of this appears in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Yet for millions of Americans the power of this simple tale has had an impact difficult to measure but real, that has helped bring us, if not yet to a satisfactory resolution of our race problem, at least to a better place than the poor sad land where "There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it."

CARING HOMES

Placing a family member in a nursing home is usually a measure of last resort: an aged parent, sibling, aunt, or uncle needs more sustained medical care than family and friends can provide. Too often, this painful transition away from a familiar home and neighborhood to a new, institutional environment is exacerbated by a family's worries about the quality of care they can expect. Widespread abuses—a frequent theme in nursing home stories—have included beatings, unnecessary restraints, and patient neglect. Nursing homes have been known to hire aides without any training, to skimp on nursing care, and to place arbitrary and unnecessary limits on patients' rights. There has been fraud in Medicaid and Medicare billing, which, though it may not directly affect care, does suggest the ethics and attitudes of many nursing home operators.

Now, however, thanks to the Nursing Home Quality Reform Act, signed in December of 1987 and going into effect over the next two-and-a-half years, fears of mistreatment, lack of privacy, and inadequate care have been addressed and federal standards set down.

The new legislation includes a detailed slate of patient protections and standards for nursing home staffs that will affect more than 1.3 million people in nursing homes covered by federal Medicaid or Medicare, and 1.7 million others who receive home care also funded through these programs. Credit goes to the National Citizens Coalition for Nursing Home Reform—a group of consumer advocates who have worked for a decade with patients and nursing home owners and their staffs. Congress, too, deserves credit for its tenacity in resisting the president's plans in 1981 to ease federal regulations for nursing homes, despite the successive studies which have repeatedly uncovered evidence of laxity and abuse.

The new law has real bite. Any homes found failing to meet federal standards for three years—one third of all nursing homes, according to a recent study conducted by the General Accounting Office—will have their Medicare/Medicaid payments withheld and they will be subject to fines.

Other protections include the patients' rights to choose a personal physician; to participate in planning their own care; to be free from physical or mental abuse, corporal punishment, involuntary seclusion; to receive notice before changes in room or roommate; to voice grievances. The new law also requires training for nurses' aides; licensed nurses to be on duty twenty-four hours a day; and a registered nurse for eight hours each day.

This is a good law, but implementation will be a struggle—the reform means added costs to federal and state governments as well as to patients not covered by Medicaid or Medicare, and an increased demand for nurses already in short supply. Of course, laws are limited in their ability to change people's attitudes toward the sick and elderly. Still, government's duty is to protect its weakest citizens, in part by passing legislation

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which fosters attitudes of respect and genuine care for the helpless. For the aged and ill—mothers and fathers, aunts, uncles, siblings, and friends, many of whom will live out their last days in nursing homes—this new law is good news, long overdue.

ET CETERA

THE INDIANS AND THE FOREST Last year in these pages, Arthur Powers wrote of the land grab in Goias in central Brazil (May 8, 1987, pp. 288-90). A combination of underdevelopment, government reforestation projects, and corruption has ended in pushing from subsistence farms thousands of Brazilian peasants who have neither the skills nor the means to survive in the urban areas to which many of them have migrated. The net effect: malnutrition and death from starvation, especially among infants and children; chronic unemployment; and over-populated urban areas that have little to offer these erstwhile farmers.

A recent visitor to *Commonweal*'s offices told the story of an equally desperate situation developing on the northwest frontier of Brazil, the Calha Norte. The military has decided to create a security zone 4,000 miles long and 93 miles wide, along Brazil's borders with Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and the three Guianas.

Much of this land is Amazon rain forest. In spite of its immense green tracts, the area is ecologically fragile and the soil thin. The Yanomamo Indians, who inhabit the area where our visitor has worked for over twenty years, do not farm; they are hunters and gatherers who survive by moving their villages every several years to allow the forest to regenerate itself. The Yanomamo are an aboriginal people whose way of life, though in harmony with their environment, is out of synch with the development plans of the Brazilian military and the mining interests eager to get at the territory's deposits of gold and diamonds.

The Consolata missionaries who have worked in the area for some forty years have tried to preserve the Yanomamo way of life, while gradually preparing the Indians for the cultural changes to come—the agenda as well of FUNAI (the National Indian Foundation). Now that has changed. The Consolatas have been removed from their mission, the military is moving in, free-lance, "illegal" prospectors have begun to pan for alluvial gold, and the Yanomamo way of life is threatened. The few Indians who survive this onslaught will be bereft of their culture and any hope for a more gradual and peaceful transition to "a civilized way of life."

Our visitor understood very well the trade-offs between development, the needs of the Indians, and even the situation of the gold prospectors, many of them refugees from the rural upheavals and urban overcrowding in other parts of Brazil. Yet he criticized this new policy as part of a perennial and unsuccessful pattern in Brazil: "Because of the social, economic, and political threat represented by the millions of dispossessed, the quick-fix solution is to let them occupy the far northern lands of the Amazon rain forest....Century-old social problems will be resolved not by social justice but by displacement of its population. In the past, this pattern did not create a major threat because the Brazilian population was relatively small....Nowadays, however, the migration of millions of have-nots to the Amazon rain forest is both a myopic short-term solution for Brazil's social problems and a disaster for the delicate Amazon rain forest environment and its aboriginal population."

LISTENING IN SILENCE Talking about Israel is no easy matter. Gregory Baum reminds us in his review of *The Yellow Wind* (pp. 308-09): "Conscious of the history of Christian anti-Semitism and the church's silence during the Holocaust, many Christians have tended to refrain from criticizing Israel. More than that, the Jewish establishment has often denounced critics of Israeli policies as anti-Semites." Despite these restraints, the fact of the occupation plus the Israeli response to the uprising have brought on pressure for North American Christians and Jews to speak out "against the occupation in solidarity with Israel's best interests."

The debate within the Jewish community has been particularly intense—and instructive: there are voices more candid and critical than any outsider's could be, and as Baum reports,

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many of these voices are eloquent and impressive.

Tikkun is certainly one: Michael Lerner's editorial (March/April) is a lengthy analysis of the theological, historical, and political arguments against present occupation policies. The next issue (May/June) of the same magazine contains a fair and informative survey by Abraham Brumberg of political dissent and assent to the occupation among Israeli political and intellectual leaders.

The usually hawkish *New Republic* published the subtly differing reflections of three of its editors, with Leon Wieseltier, in particular, voicing the contending moral themes of Jewish history that frame the present tragedy (March 14, 1988).

Moment debates "Should American Jewish Organizations Publicly Criticize Israel on Peace Issues?" (March 1988) and "Is the Occupation Brutalizing Israel?" (April 1988). In our view, the "Yes" side of the debate makes the better case. But Albert Vorspan of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations reports on the anguish and soul-searching that criticism of Israel brings to one of its ardent supporters (*New York Times Magazine*, May 8, 1988).

Finally, Robert McAfee Brown (*Christian Century*, April 6, 1988) proposes some ground rules for Christians "Speaking About Israel" that will prove helpful in the continuing debates.

MINIMUM-WAGE LEGISLATION

THE WORKER'S MITE
TO BE PAID & STILL POOR

Having a job ought to mean something: food on the table, a place to live, a way to pay the doctor when the kids get sick. Instead, for six million people earning at or below the minimum wage (and another six million earning just slightly above it), full-time, full-year work means poverty. Since 1981 the minimum wage has been stuck at $3.35 an hour, or $6,968 a year—and that's poor.

Now Congress has bills pending to change the minimun wage. The Senate version, S.837, would raise it to $4.65 an hour by 1990 (roughly what is needed for a family of three to escape poverty in 1988). For tactical reasons the version in the House, H.R. 1834, has a top figure of $5.05 an hour in 1990, but that proposal is not expected to survive the legislative process.

The White House and a long list of business and trade associations want to defeat even this modest increase; if supporters of a higher minimum wage don't act fast, they may.

It's been fifty years since Congress first established the minimum wage as a minimally acceptable standard of living for anyone working full time, and much of the time since, that's what it's been. Through most of the 1960s and 1970s, a minimum wage was enough to keep a worker with two dependents out of poverty. But then in the 1980s, its value started to decline. Now full-time work at the minimum gets a family of three just 72 percent of the poverty line; even with one adult working full time and another working half time at the minimum, a family of four is still poor. That's why America has so many "working poor."

Despite that, this year's bills to raise the minimum are in trouble. When they come to a vote late this month or in early June they may be defeated or changed for the worse (set a lower minimum, or include some version of a sub-minimum—chiefly affecting women, minorities, and youths).

This time around the two most frequently mentioned arguments against raising the minimum—higher inflation and lost jobs—don't loom as large. Economists now generally agree: raising the minimum has marginal impact on inflation because most workers earn substantially more than the minimum; and adult jobs aren't at risk—even for teens, a 10 percent increase in the minimum would produce only an estimated 1 percent decrease in job opportunities. The positives far outweigh the negatives.

Politics and timing pose far greater obstacles. Organized labor has been preoccupied with the trade bill (and with trying to line up votes for a veto override), and other supporters haven't been organized or visible enough. Members of Congress haven't heard why they should be for the bill, and as a result seem to be basing their votes on what it means to their campaign contributors, rather than what it means to poor families.

Unfortunately, losing this one means that some 12 million low-earning working people and their families will lose out, as will all the grocery stores, landlords, and merchants in the neighborhoods where they shop and live. "The trade bill," one lobbyist pointed out, "is important symbolically; but what's at stake in the minimum wage bill is all real." It's time we told the Congress so. NANCY AMIDEI

Nancy Amidei has written frequently on poverty, hunger, and human services issues in these pages.

'THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE'

OLD BUSINESS & NEW
THE BISHOPS, SDI, & DETERRENCE

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops' ad hoc Committee on the Moral Evaluation of Deterrence Policy has released its draft report on the 1983 pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*. The report will be considered for adoption by the bishops as a whole in June.

The committee's charge was "to assess all the relevant facts

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and moral principles needed to present . . . a judgment on the moral status of deterrence." It was to use *The Challenge of Peace* as a baseline from which to evaluate policy developments, not to call into question any of the fundamental principles of that document. Observers who judge the 1983 letter to be less than perfect may regret these restricted terms of reference. Nevertheless, the 1983 letter grew out of a much more intensive effort than could possibly be mustered for a new report, less than half as long, produced so soon afterward. It is also not clear whether any tempering (or tampering) now would produce a more progressive document.

Even with the restricted charge, three major pieces of business require attention.

The first concerns the bishops' evaluation of SDI (Star Wars). The SDI controversy erupted only after the 1983 letter was essentially complete; thus interpreters have had to infer what the bishops' attitude would have been had they addressed it directly. As a result, many SDI proponents could thrust themselves under the bishops' umbrella, claiming SDI to be the "moral high ground," since, if practicable, it would make countercity warfare deterrence both unnecessary and impossible. The bishops do not wish to keep this company. To counter the claim for SDI, the report goes on at length—perhaps too great a length, taking as big a portion of the report (25 percent) as some SDI advocates would like it to take of the federal budget. Consequently, the press may treat the report as "the bishops' letter on SDI," which would be a pity because there is much more to it. Still, self-serving interpretations by SDI advocates have made the bishops "part of the problem" for SDI opponents, and the new analysis is welcome.

Here the bishops distinguish between an "ethic of intention" and an "ethic of consequences." Good intentions are not enough. Rather, could the *factual condition* of freeing the world from assured destruction likely be achieved by SDI, and, if not, would the effects of deploying it likely be pernicious? The bishops then tot up the risks of pursuing SDI: "risks to the existing arms control regime; risks of introducing . . . uncertainty into the already delicate political-psychological fabric of deterrence; risks that defensive systems can have real or perceived offensive uses; finally, risks that some forms of SDI would be ineffective against an adversary's first strike, but more effective against a retaliatory second-strike, thereby eroding crisis stability." While SDI should be "maintained as a research program, within the restraints of the ABM Treaty," the risks above pose a danger "to the dynamic of deterrence that leaves us unconvinced of the merits of proceeding toward deployment." Their skepticism is obvious.

"Will you take off that stupid T-shirt!"

The second bit of unfinished business concerns deterrence itself. The letter's analysis was subject to varying interpretations: some inadvertent; some deliberate (to claim support for particular evaluations or recommendations); and some mischievous (to discredit the document by attributing to it an argument that could then be ridiculed). An authoritative clarification was needed explicating points that were deliberately left ambiguous, or compromised, in 1983. The "acceptable" role of nuclear weapons—as deterrents, or as weapons for possible use in war—especially needed explication.

The new report repeats the "absolute categorical" prohibition against deliberately targeting civilians, and restates the very strong presumption against any first use of nuclear weapons. It then recognizes that the letter's position on retaliatory (or second) use in a "limited exchange" is "less categorical than its opposition to civilian bombing and it is less clear than its opposition to first-use." The problem, of course, is that for nuclear weapons to have any effective role in deterrence there must be some, however slight, possibility they might be used, and that possible use must not be clearly and certainly illicit.

The bishops' "presumption against second-use" was therefore "not a prohibition"; its effect, however, "is to place the burden of proof on those who assert that 'limited use' is politically and morally possible"; that burden is "a very heavy one." Any use that would not be condemnable would have to respect the traditional just-war principles of discrimination and proportionality. Such hypothetical uses of nuclear weapons are hard to imagine; the door is open only the barest crack.

The bishops' formulation is intended to dispel "notions that nuclear weapons are 'normal,' 'controlled' instruments of military policy," and "to build a barrier against nuclear use." The permissible range of judgment runs from one that in practice no use could ever satisfy just-war principles, to one that says *some* very limited retaliatory uses might not be utterly unacceptable. This restricted range, nevertheless, requires practical moral judgments, by individuals, judgments which depend on differing guesses about the real prospects and the values at stake that would make any use "proportionate" or not. Wherever each of us falls on this narrow range, the bishops' stance shows a respect for individual conscience that we should value—in this or other realms of moral discourse.

The final piece of business is new as well as old. Because the temperature of East-West politics has warmed so markedly since 1983, we must develop some vision of the world beyond nuclear deterrence. "The paradox of the nuclear age is that vast amounts of intellectual and political energy must be expended to assure that something does not occur: nuclear war. But this is an insufficient conception of the political-moral challenge of our time. An equal amount of human effort must

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be invested in shaping a just relationship among states and within states."

This is a good passage, and there are others in the same vein. But most of the report is concerned with matters like deterrence and arms control, and shows some fear of appearing naive about Soviet-American relations. For example, "the two nations are divided by history, philosophy, polity, and conflicting interests. The possibility which may be open is not to transcend these fundamental differences, but to regulate the competitive relationship with new criteria." This is too timid. We can say yes to regulation, but yes also to transcending. We must not condemn our posterity to unending reliance on policies of threats between adversaries. Without compromising our principles and ideals, the current confrontation must ultimately be superseded by broad political understandings. The chance to move in that direction, through greater liberalization in the Soviet Union and openness across borders, may now be emerging.

Great ideological and religious conflicts of the past have ultimately softened as adversaries came to understand if not always agree with one another. American-Chinese relations are a contemporary example. The Western democracies, after bitter wars in which some were ruled by totalitarian regimes, have for more than forty years constituted, among themselves if not toward others, the largest zone of peace in the history of the world. Earlier—an example it would be nice to see our bishops invoke—Catholics and Protestants in Central Europe stopped killing each other in the name of religion. Capitalists and Communists also can learn to live with each other.

Reduction of Soviet-American hostilities and improved understanding will take time and be fraught with difficulty. Existing tensions will not disappear overnight. Despite liberalization, the Soviet Union may never be a democratic society as we comprehend that term. But there is a chance now to begin the process of establishing a less-threatening and more secure basis of peace. The bishops can help, as can we all.

BRUCE RUSSETT

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OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

DISTRACTION AT THE HEART

WHAT WILL WE PASS ON?

Recently I read Geir Kjetsaa's *Fyodor Dostoyevsky: A Writer's Life* (Viking, 1987). It is a solid and interesting biography and, as at least one reviewer pointed out, emphasizes the religious element in Dostoyevsky's work more than most other biographies have. That's why I began to read it. But something else impressed me. It wasn't something Kjetsaa meant to stress, and in fact it occupies relatively little space in the book, but it keeps haunting me.

Dostoyevsky's father was a physician who involved his family in reading, and reading seems to have been a collective experience as well as a private one. Plays were read out loud; children were exposed at a relatively young age to Homer, Shakespeare, Pushkin, and to the romantic philosophers who fascinated a lot of literate Russians. That was something encountered in the home. Outside the home, and inside as well, was the pervasive culture of Russia, full of folk-tales and songs that Dostoyevsky learned from people who cared for him as a child; and the Orthodox church was always a part of his life. As a young man he was a member of an intellectual community, much of which existed in a vigorous way outside of any academic establishment.

What impressed me about this aspect of Dostoyevsky's life was how different it is from our current culture, and how drastic the difference is. I do not want to sentimentalize the culture of nineteenth-century Russia. A lot of ugly things were in the air—anti-Semitism was hardly considered a prejudice; it was more an assumption, and it forms an ugly strain in Dostoyevsky's work. The fact that the abolition of serfdom was even something to be debated is a sign that all was not well. Granted that cultures can bear poison as well as balm, there is still something in that culture, and its difference from ours, that needs exploring.

The two important levels in the world of Dostoyevsky and his contemporaries were the general Russian culture, involving both Orthodox Christianity and the folk culture of the people, and the world of the intelligentsia, a world that involved contemporary Russian and international writing as well as the literature of the ancient, medieval, and renaissance periods in the West.

At any rate, the images a Russian—wealthy or poor, educated or uneducated—had of what the world meant came from sources involving long and rich views of what the world is about, and even where those views got silly (romantic philosophy, for example), they were understood as parts of that longer view or, in the case of the nihilists, a conscious reaction against it. A child whose imagination is formed by folktales or Homer is given something significantly different from a child whose imagination encounters nothing more powerful than the Smurfs or Care Bears.

This isn't snobbery. I don't want to recommend a Czarist solution to our educational and cultural problems. The point here is that Homer and folktales are formed by profound imagining, by the interpretation of many people, by considerations of what does and does not matter about being human, about nobil-

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ity, about those things you want to hand on to your children as important. What we give our children, culturally, should be a kind of equipment to help them get through life, knowing what matters, something that can bring them to the point where they hand something on to their own children.

Our common culture is made up of advertising, and the images it generates, and politics. There is something profoundly disturbing about this. In totalitarian countries the proportions are different: there the culture is politics, and maybe a limited amount of permitted advertising and consequent imagining. But what needs to be seen is that something on the periphery of traditional culture has become the center of ours (by "ours" I mean both the culture of America and Europe, and the Soviet Union); and the elements of culture which were seen as central in other societies—even if this was often, even usually, hypocritical—are now seen as peripheral, maybe dangerous, in a secular world.

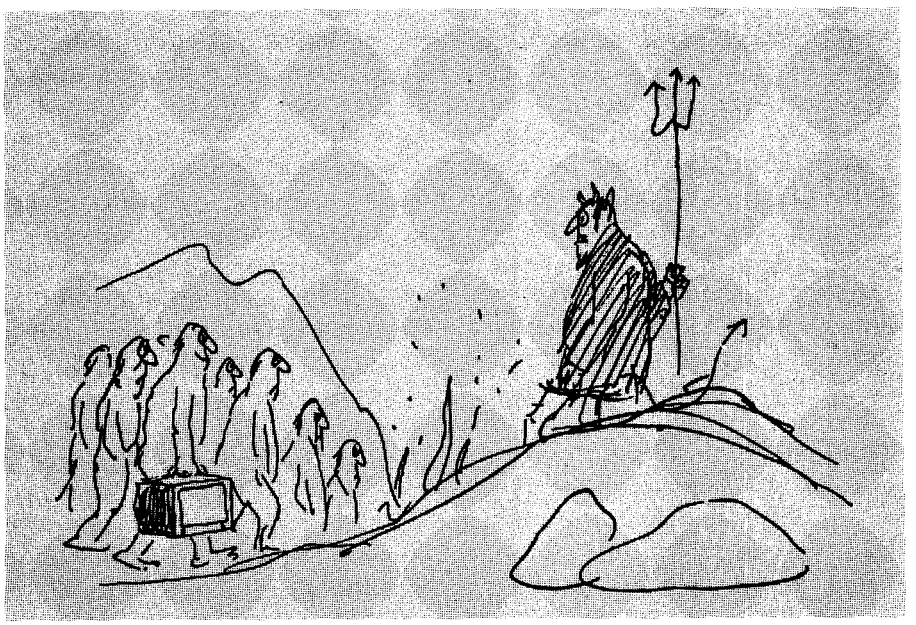
People have always been attracted to distraction and to frivolity and, although Savonarola could never quite understand this, we need these things. Relatively few people (excepting the Irish) can spend most of their time thinking about the fact that they will die. And so most cultures know bear-baiting or the equivalent, sensational broadsides, pornography, games whose point is the fact that they are pointless, and so forth. What these things have in common is the satisfaction of appetites that don't matter much, or may even be destructive; but, for the moment they are indulged, and they blunt our awareness of mortality. Most cultures have managed to make some room for this obvious human need. Ours may be the first to put it at the center.

Our children grow up surrounded by television, not simply watching it. It is their environment, unless they are Amish, or unless parents have taken a particularly isolated approach to childrearing. It forms what they want, what they find interesting, what they expect of life. In some homes reading is encouraged, but the reading seldom immerses the child in the great myths or the great literature of the past. Outside the home is a culture dominated by advertising and consumption, the creation of and satisfaction of appetites. Religion is considered a private and subjective taste; morality is a preference—an admirable one, to be sure. Art is not really a part of our shared life; it is confined to museums. The intellectual life has been exiled to the academic reservation.

If distraction is at the center of our culture, as it was never at the center of any other, we must at least understand how strange that fact is, how frightening. In other societies great religious and philosophical truths were at least paid hypocritical tribute, and alleged to be central, even where they were not in fact. What united most cultures was a shared religious or ethnic identity. What unites ours is the culture of distraction, and law.

There is no way for us to impose a common culture on a pluralistic society, or a common religion, or a single value system, nor would that be desirable. Just before I began writing this article I shopped at an Asian food store a few blocks from my house, and the Vietnamese owner was listening to American country music when I walked in. I come from an Irish-American background, married someone from the Philippines, and have friends who are Jews and Buddhists. I would not at all prefer to live in a society which, like Dostoyevsky's, tolerated and at times encouraged scorn for the Jews, intolerance of anything foreign, and suppressed religions other than the one favored by the government. The late Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann was prophetic in his assertion that secularism is a lie about the world; but it must also be said of many past and some present societies that theocracy is a lie about God.

Still, there is something frightening about a society based so thoroughly on distraction and the satisfaction of immediate desires, particularly when those desires are fashioned by people who can make money from them. I do not believe there is a solution to our problem, in the sense that a solution would involve the creation of an alternative society. But the nearest thing to a solution might be understanding how strange our situation is, how weird we are. Other ages (like Dostoyevsky's) had their own set of evils, but there was within the cultural tradition a depth of possible alternatives to those evils. By placing questions of value and meaning in the realm of the private and subjective, we have created a new kind of human problem. It may not be necessary or desirable to think of a clear alternative—there may not be one. We should at least raise our children to know that they do not belong to this world, and the moment they feel adjusted to it, comfortable in it, they should worry about what they have become, and so should we. □



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LETTING SANJI DIE

HOW CULTURES UNDERSTAND DEATH & LOSS

ELIZABETH BEVERLY &
RICHARD WIGHTMAN FOX

Historians and anthropologists have had a lot to say to one another lately. Historians have learned that deep cultural realities defy decade-by-decade chronology. Anthropologists have learned that deep cultural realities are historically rooted and forever evolving. Both have grasped that inquiry is not a quest to expose some reality "out there" in the bush or in the historical record, but a process by which reality is both probed and formed. Culture is always under construction; the interpretations of culture produced by writers and scholars are themselves part of the building.

The two of us—one an anthropologist, the other a historian—have conversed a good deal recently about how to study culture. One day we were talking about conceptions of death in America and Senegal, where Elizabeth spent five years in two Mandinka villages. The more we talked about the two societies' views of death, the more we realized we had to confront our own personal histories. For while social orders do delimit the range of possible experiences of life and death, each person's experience is always distinctive. We have each inherited certain assumptions about death and dying, but we have also cultivated a new understanding. Culture is not just passed on. It is reseen, revised. What follows is a conversation in two voices, a tale of two histories moving toward a fuller view of death and dying.

Growing up a Catholic boy in middle-class California in the 1950s, I was strangely divided on the subject of death. Church was all about death. The priests at St. Martin of Tours parish in West L.A., where Pat O'Brien, Dennis Day, and Richard Egan took up the collections, were always preaching about martyrs brutally murdered for the faith. The rich brown, carved wooden crucifix hung on the wall behind the altar, and if you went to confession at the right time on Saturday afternoon, sunlight would stream through the red stained glass window and splash blood all over Jesus' protruding ribs.

I thought about death all the time when I was at Mass, or at the Wednesday afternoon catechism class for public school kids. The sisters told us to be ready to die anytime, and to be sure that we were in a state of grace when the moment came. Father O'Reilly added a deeper dimension when I was older: the point was not just to avoid sin, but to know what was worth dying for. But I assumed most people would die slowly in sickness, not valiantly in self-sacrifice. I was captivated by the words "extreme unction." The words themselves were oily and rich, just like the exotic oils I imagined being rubbed into the pale wrinkled flesh of a dying person.

But in public school, and at home, death never came up. It was taboo. I never went to a funeral. It was not just because all my relatives were on the East Coast. Even when I was there, at age seven, and my grandfather Fox died 200 miles away, I wasn't invited to the funeral. I was told a lot about death in church, but shielded from it in fact. It never seemed a normal part of life. Death didn't strike. It was an idea that intrigued me, not a real presence. No one died in my house, my friends' houses, or in Ozzie and Harriett's house. When people got killed on "Dragnet," Sgt. Friday would lift the sheet and wince at the lifeless face. But he never mourned. No one he cared about ever died.

When I was eighteen, I read *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Ivan's tirade to Alyosha about the suffering of children chilled me. Ivan could not accept a world in which children were made to suffer and die simply because adults used their God-given freedom and chose to abuse them. No good God would permit children to be tortured just because he wanted adults to be free to choose good or evil and settle their eternal fates. Ivan was so right, I thought. I was furious that any child should die, for *any* reason. Like Dr. Paneloux in Camus's *The Plague*, I couldn't get over the injustice of it. It was natural for me to feel that way since I had never known a child to die.

There was another reason to view the death of children as incompatible with the idea of a good God. If the point of life were to mature to the standpoint from which one could freely

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choose good or evil, then it made no sense for someone to die before the age of decision. It wrecked the whole scheme. Even after I had started to secularize the scheme in my twenties, it still made no sense. The point of life was to reach maturity, to grow in understanding of the world and of oneself. To die in childhood was not to have lived. If the acorn did not become an oak it had not fulfilled its destiny.

When I had kids of my own, I never thought of making out a will. My wife and I only recently decided to write one—now that they're seventeen and sixteen, are almost ready to leave home, and really don't need us to indicate whom they would live with if we died. I don't think my failure to compose a will when they really needed one was a product of my own fear of death. It was rather that I felt I was indispensable to their growth toward maturity, to their own life. I didn't want to confront, in a cold legal document, the possibility that their movement to adulthood would be diverted by my death. They would suffer if I died, and I could not contemplate their suffering.

Middle-class American parents bear a terrible burden of guilt for what *may* happen to their children. If they get sick, we feel responsible for finding the right doctor, the right treatment. We can never do enough. In colonial America, parents watched many of their children die. God wanted them back, it was thought. It was his responsibility. Since it is the essence of middle-class adulthood to believe that one is in firm control, we carry the great weight of responsibility for our children's very lives.

Eighteen years ago in the Mandinka village of Marsassoum, a little boy named Sanji fell from the top of a mango tree. I heard the shouts of the other children, and was the first adult to arrive at the scene. There I found Sanji conscious, lying in the soft dusty grove by the river, a bone protruding so neatly from his wrist that, at first sight, the bone appeared to be a polished wooden peg, an ingenious device to staunch a bleeding wound. But exposed bone is a path into the body, and with that fall, a new kind of death entered our lives.

Death by gangrene is horrible. Not simply because the disease produced intense suffering, but also because with "proper medical care," no little boy should have to die of gangrene. My husband and I *knew* that then, and had no intention of letting Sanji die. We coordinated a medical evacuation to the regional capital; we set in motion an effort requiring two A.I.D. project trucks, a fleet of local dugout canoes, as well as the services of a Dutch doctor waiting in the regional capital miles away.

When, a couple of hours after the fall, we saw Sanji nestled in the beamy canoe, entrusted to the care of a local rice specialist (a man who had trained in the U.S.), we felt confident and relieved. Off they went across the river in search of competent care. We slept well that night, and were awakened the following morning by the rice specialist's voice at the door. He'd come to tell us that things were fine; there was no trouble.

Where is Sanji?, we asked.

In his father's hut, Demba answered. They hadn't gone to the regional capital after all. Too far. They'd gone to a healer who could set the bone. Now they were back.

For the next three days, Sanji died. Staked to the floor of his father's hut, Sanji lay semi-conscious as his arm swelled and the stench swelled and the flies harried him. For the next three days Sanji's father sat by the boy and watched, patiently swishing the flies away from the hot putrefaction. When we came to call, the father chatted with us, as his hand swept the swarming flies back and forth in the sour air. I bent down to offer Sanji a wet rag to suck, but even as I comforted him, I wondered why we were letting him die.

Why wasn't anybody *doing* anything? Once an American nurse working for Catholic Relief Services had told me that "the people" felt "different" about their children from the way "we" feel about ours. Not that "they" don't *love* them, she told me. But so many children die. . . . "They" just can't feel what we feel. I wanted her to be wrong. I wanted Sanji's father to fight Sanji's death. Sitting in the hut, I could not doubt the father's love. Was the love he felt "different" from that an American father would feel? I didn't know. But I knew even then that Sanji's father felt different about death. About *dying*.

During our years with the Mandinko, I saw many more deaths. Not all were as shocking as Sanji's, although many were equally unexpected. All were sad. I remember that in the early days, again and again when death seemed imminent, I would be swept up in a flurry of planning to save "life." This high purpose would carry me through darkened huts, right past

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mothers and fathers and husbands and wives who were spending time in a different way: sitting in the company of the dying, swishing flies, bathing faces, giving drink. While I struggled against death, they held the dying.

In Mandinkakangho I can find no word for *death*, no big sturdy noun to embody both an instant and a permanent condition. Death slides into conversation as a verb: someone is dying, someone had died. In this way the fact of death seems to concern the act of dying. Death is not something you meet, *dying* is something you *do*. Each individual is the literal agent of his or her demise. That act is always a mystery for those of us who have not yet "done" it. Always a mystery for the living.

At least some of the mystery concerns the almost-conscious state of the newly dead. Our English word for death derives from the Indo-European root *dheu*, which is also a verb: to become senseless. Implicit in this root, and in our changing medical definition of death, is the idea of "consciousness." The dead, the truly dead, are no longer "sensible." They have somehow departed from the body. We can think of few things more horrible than a conscious mind trapped inside a dead body.

Among the Mandinko, the act of dying engages the body even after the apparent "death" of the body. Life may be finished (*abanta*), but the dead one keeps on dying. Although no longer capable of communication, the body is not "senseless." It is simply beyond *our* touch. I was told by one friend that the word for corpse (*mo furingh*) is related to the word for bud (*firingh*); the meaning packed into such a word defies time. *Latent* life is not what we consider death.

For the Mandinko, the *ni*, an essence we might equate with soul, is aware of physical sensations and purely human emotions even if the body appears to be unaware. Because of that awareness, one must not grieve too loudly in the presence of a corpse. Unable to speak, the newly dead have no way to reassure the living that all is well. Loud grief is not courteous because it reminds the corpse of the sorrow it has caused the community.

The same courtesy of patient silence is due the dying who, even in company, labor alone. One must try to heal, but one must also hold; over the years, this is what I have learned about dying. I don't believe that I needed to live among the Mandinko in order to learn such literal patience. My mother knows this, has known the mercies and courtesies for longer than I've known *her*.

The last Mandinka child I held unto death was probably dying of meningitis; Vie wanted me to cradle his head in my lap. As I supported him so, and rubbed his silky back, I thought of my mother and the story she had told me of her mother's long illness. How my mother filed her dying mother's fingernails, trimmed the cuticles just so, buffed the nails to a high sheen. How her mother smiled at her pleasure, and in pain.

My grandmother was *dying*, and my mother was helping her. They both were using this "dying time" the best way they could. In this way Sanji's father and my mother are no different from each other. And what they know, *we* need to know.

I live in Portland, my father in Los Angeles, my mother in Tampa, and my brother in Washington, D.C.: an all-American, four-corner distribution. No wonder dying is so infrequently a communal or familial experience in middle-class America, no wonder it is so often no longer a part of living. Harry Emerson Fosdick recalled in his memoirs that as a boy in late-nineteenth-century New York he watched day after day as an uncle, propped up in bed and surrounded by relatives, passed away. But Fosdick was writing in the 1950s, and went on to remark at how odd it now seemed that a boy of ten had ever been permitted to witness such things.

But my childhood family is scattered for the same reason that it's so hard for me to contemplate the death of a child: to be human is to grow up and go your own way. For me, living fully has always meant becoming the mature oak, being fulfilled by life. Liberal middle-class culture insists that adulthood means becoming a unique individual, staking out a claim beyond the confines of one's past. The historic contribution of liberalism has been to liberate people from the grasp of arbitrary authorities—political, religious, cultural. In middle-class America we still act out this historic quest: we prepare our children to leave home at age eighteen, to go beyond the authority of the family itself.

It is precisely because we are such thorough-going individualists that we periodically devour books like Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*—books that chastise us for forgetting about community. Reading *Habits* is like going to confession. We enumerate our individualist sins, even if after saying our penance we go back to our inherited middle-class vision: community is something to transcend, not just fit into. That may be what has most intrigued me about death since the beginning. Antigone, Socrates, Jesus, Thomas More: heroic, principled death as the act of standing beyond actual community, as loyalty to ideal community.

But everyone is not called to die in heroic opposition to an oppressive authority. Most of us are called to die in community. It is wrong to erect heroic sacrifice as the norm of excellence in the art of dying, just as it is wrong to insist too strongly on the mature oak as the norm of fullness in human life. Fulfillment comes as much from the fruition of communal bonds as it does from individual achievement. This insight can lead us toward a new understanding of death—even the death of children. Perhaps it is because my own children are now almost out of high school, almost ready for their ritual departure—"going away" to college—that I'm able to reexamine my feelings about all this. When they were younger I didn't want to think about it at all.

In 1973, when my children were two and three, I was a Stanford history graduate student. Religion professor Jerry Irish and his family, at Stanford's campus in Germany for the year, suffered a horrible loss. Thirteen-year-old Lee contracted acute meningitis and died in less than a day. He was the second of the Irishes' sons to die: in 1969 five-year-old Mark

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had died of a heart condition. Now twelve-year-old Jeff was an only child. Jerry Irish wrote a book about his family's experience, *A Boy Thirteen: Reflections on Death*, published in 1975. When the book came out I couldn't pick it up. I was not ready to encounter words about such loss, such pain. But recently I remembered the book and found it in the local library. I was ready to read it.

The book takes its title from the remarkable poem that twelve-year-old Jeff wrote about Lee a few days after Lee's death. Jeff had been eight when his younger brother Mark died, and had learned then about dying. In his poem about Lee he does not dwell on the fact of Lee's death, does not try to make sense of it. "I loved him and needed him and I don't understand," he confesses. Instead of trying to figure death out he writes of Lee's full life. "He had bought a camera," Jeff writes, "A single-lens reflex/ He had a lot of new things going on." Perhaps it takes a younger brother to understand how full even the life of a child can be: the older sibling is crafty, intrepid, experienced in the ways of the world. At twelve, looking back on his brother, Jeff had begun a new vocation of suffering. But he had also reached a wisdom about death and life that I'm still groping for. Every person, even a child who will not be an adult, has lived in fullness if the life has been among family and friends. There is much a child has not understood, much a child has never done, but we're all, whatever our age, on that same continuum. Jeff is able to see all that Lee did do, how big he was, and even—with flawless twelve-year-old perception—how much he could eat. "He had a lot of new things going on/ . . . The person I looked up to, the boy that/played baseball with me, the guy with a/new camera, my brother who I could talk to, the/one who could eat as no one else, my brother that/was five feet and nine inches tall."

The suffering of children. The passing of elders. Two summers ago both my daughter and my mother were very sick. My mother was seventy-nine; my daughter was not yet three. My mother had suffered a recurrence of cancer; my daughter had pertussis, better known as whooping cough, a disease I had first seen in West Africa.

All day long Kai would whoop and play, whoop and eat, whoop and talk, whoop and vomit. At night she lay on her father's body or mine, while thick mucous rasped her throat. When the whooping started, she couldn't breathe. Kai worked hard those days and nights. The simple act of living was hard.

I scarcely slept for six weeks. At night I held Kai and felt her body struggle to breathe. At the same time I thought of Kai's namesake, my mother, miles away. I thought of her discomfort and dignity, of her brothers and sister, her loneliness and patience. I *missed* her.

I streamed through days keeping Kai aloft, worrying about my mother, and had time for little else. One day I made an odd discovery. A friend called from another state, just to "catch up," and I heard myself relating the news about my daughter and my mother. My friend's reaction was not particularly startling; I'd been hearing it for weeks. Alarmed by Kai's illness, she had little to say about my mother's. Wasn't I *terrified* about Kai? What if she *died*?

I didn't think she would, I said. It was my *mother* I was worried about.

But she's *old*, my friend said. She's *old*.

At first I felt impatience. I thought my friend didn't understand how much I love my mother. But that wasn't the problem. As the day continued, I realized that I wanted my friend to feel her *own* grief over my mother's possible death. I wanted her to recognize that my mother's death would be a loss for *all* of us. We would be losing an elder.

I wanted us to mourn, when the time came, not simply *my* mother, but a woman born in 1906 who knows things that will go with her, things we may not remember *without* her. It is not a question of whose life is more valuable: a child's or an elder's. For most of us in America the death of a child represents a loss of potential, and such a loss horrifies us. An old lady's death is the passing of something no longer necessarily useful.

For us, living time is a process of becoming. It is almost as if an individual is a container, a fine clay jug, which starts off nearly empty, fills to a peak, then cracks or erodes from within and slowly begins to leak, until, at the end, all that remains is an empty shell of a former self, a *reminder* of fullness, not fullness itself.

My life with the Mandinko taught me something else. Even an embryo is a *self* with will and spirit and knowing. Death at any instant is the death of a self, a full human personality. To die at any age is to complete the shape of living: to be *finished*. There is no perfect location on a time line for death. Each living is full, and finished itself. Of course, the longer one lives the more familiar one grows with the Mandinka way. And an elder has been on this path for a longer time than anyone. The ways of the Mandinko *are* his or her ways. Thus, the dying of an elder represents a dying of memory. A dying of social memory. All dying embodies communal loss. A child is already a full person; an elder knows ways of being that all of us should remember.

This is the reason that I wanted my friend to feel the full weight of my mother's *living* as well as of my daughter's. My mother knows things that my friend and my daughter and I simply don't know. Some of my mother's knowledge concerns dying: how to love the dying as you let them die. She held her mother's hands and tended them, cooked soft meals for her father, read and dreamed with *my* father. Friends and relatives have called on her for years. She *waits* with them: she knows how it's done.

Not long ago my mother told me about seeing a church acquaintance in a grocery parking lot. As she got out of her car, the woman looked surprised, then pleased. Waving happily to my mother, and smiling breathlessly, she said, "Katherine, how wonderful to *see* you! Why, I thought you'd already crossed over!"

"Crossed over"! Shouldn't we as a people mourn the loss of old women, so easy in the company of mysteries we fear? So capable of speech in the face of the unspeakable?

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In earlier years, neither of us was able to look straight at death, straight at dying. We each thought a good deal about death, but neither of us knew how to see the life in death, how to live with the dying. Elizabeth encountered a lot more death than Richard did, but she too turned away from it—by scurrying to save life. Neither of us knew how to experience the life that still animates the dying, to allow them to live fully as they die, to grant even to the dead child a full life.

The Mandinko understand that dying time is part of life time; so do many Americans, such as Jeff Irish and Elizabeth's mother. Of course we need to struggle to save life whenever we can. But we also need to know how to recognize dying time. It is not just a time of struggle against death. It is a time for affirming the communal bonds that make even dying an act of living. Paul Tillich, who relished all forms of human experience, grasped this about his own death. Lying on his hospital bed in 1965, he felt his life ebbing. "Today is dying day," he said to his wife Hannah. Together they recited a favorite German poem, and he wept at the knowledge he would never say it again. He joked with his doctor, asked his nurse to help him up, then lay back on his pillow and died. Tillich had the grace to make of his own dying a communal act of caring. In this way, he allowed his dying to live in the memory of a larger community. He reminds us that the work of dying will always be the work of the living. □

Samuel Hazo

Update

Trying to toughen where the hurt
came once and where it stays,
you learn too late that nothing
heals, that years are poultices,
not cauteries.
It takes so little
for the scars to peel and show
the rawness, like a heart exposed
by surgery, alive and breathing
underneath.
You say
you should have faced your fate
like Bernhardt in her pall and let
it purge you to the bones.
But who cares
what you say?
Like any general
preparing for a war that's past,
you train yourself for battles
you've already lost and call it
wisdom.
Why can't you stop
and say instead the steady
present tense of suffering
is just too much for you?
Bernhardt in her nightly coffin
learned no more of readiness
from such rehearsals than the saints.
The death that Shakespeare said
you owe to God, you'll pay,
as she did, only once.
But other
deaths come first.
The deaths
you eat to live are bearable:
the fresh deaths of greens,
the frozen deaths of hens,
the deathtaste in the serious cracker
that is Christ, the small deaths
you call goodbyes, the sweet
deaths that lovers die each time
they mate.
The deaths that silence
you are those you thought
could never happen, but they did.
They leave you asking what
became of God.
Midnights
are voids where sleep no longer
executes you into dawn but lets
you linger and survive.
By dark
you sweat the sweat of stones.
By light you doodle circles
on a pad to show yourself
that something still can be complete.
If you believe the "truest life"
is when you are in "dreams awake,"
your life is true beyond belief.
Your past is not your shadow
but yourself, and now will stay
right now until you die.

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MAGNIFICENT 'POWAQQATSI'

A MIXTURE OF REGGIO & GLASS

Powaqqatsi is the Hopi word for "the sorcerer who steals from life," and the first sign of this film's unusual significance. *Powaqqatsi*'s predecessor, *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983), earned cult status as an art theater release, followed by years on PBS's "Great Performances" and new life on the Turner Broadcasting System and on videotape. *Koyaanisqatsi,* or "life out of balance," was a wordless but musical documentary on life in the United States—the result of inspired teamwork between director Godfrey Reggio and composer Phillip Glass. Few recent films have been more stirring.

The new film, the second in a planned trilogy, again combines their talents in a unique way. Reggio, a former Christian Brother who lives in New Mexico, here applies his religious feeling and passion for native cultures to a much larger subject, the "fate of the earth." Like its predecessor, *Powaqqatsi* brilliantly mixes electrifying music and stunning photography. Any viewer of the first film knows how hard an act it would be to follow. What images could rival *Koyaanisqatsi*? The thoughts might have been clichéd, but the art raised them to a grand, prophetic level. With cinematographer Ron Fricke, Reggio filmed America, beginning with slow pans of places like Monument Valley, picking up speed with aerial shots of the West Coast and Midwest farmland, then intensifying his frames with time-lapse photography that caught the frenetic pace of cities like New York. The final sequence in slow motion depicted a space launch blowing up— a scene at which one smugly snickered until the Challenger disaster. But Reggio was after bigger game: prophecy for spaceship earth.

Glass's music added another layer. For starters, he composed grand majestic sonorities, then added rapid fire electronic staccato to match scenes of urban franticness. For the close, Glass composed a solemn organ solo with a chant of the Hopi title phrase, rendered in the bass style liturgies of Tibetan monks. When they write the history of music in our time, one fact is sure: Glass and proponents of new music will be seen in their full colors, not just as innovators but also as reactionaries rebelling against the desiccation of melody, energy, and rhythm by musical modernism. Glass's tuneful postlude relies not just on primitive sources; it also amounts to one of the finest contemporary allusions to Bach.

In this new film, Glass's music, though not as powerful, is again synthesized with the visual material, a view of the third world industrializing. Glass employs high soprano and tenor lines of a Peruvian children's choir; he blends his minimalist lyricism with indigenous instruments (especially some superb Andean flutes) and Amerindian, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern motifs. Glass's major theme, superbly celebratory, is announced early, matching Reggio's shots of traditional ways of life, before a deluge of details documenting the squalor linked to progress.

As in *Koyaanisqatsi*, Reggio and Glass's imagery has strong religious connotations. The screenplay traces the arc of a material and spiritual fall: innocence, sin, and hope for redemption. Indeed, in the tradition of encyclicals like *Mater et magistra* (which Reggio claims inspired him long ago) and the more recent *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, the film shows the vital connection between material and spiritual well-being Reggio is no primitivist; his Eden of natural beauty and traditional craftsmanship includes heavy, hard work. But as his shots make clear, the work is either self-directed or involves self-employment in hunting, gathering, fishing, or carpentry. Even the first cities seen in the film are on a human scale, older third-world cities with modestly clean, working-class areas. From this state, Reggio's camera descends to urban shantytowns, to the realm of Sin and Death, where his images reveal mainly boredom, agony, or torpor.

The film avoids the clichéd images of the networks when they periodically rediscover famine. Reggio renews our awareness of third-world suffering by focusing not on food but work, and the way that technology—when applied without sensitivity to ancient cultures—dehumanizes individuals even if building the wealth of nations. Reggio concentrates on children, not hungry but *angry* ones—an African child scowling over raised fists, an Egyptian girl lashing cattle in fury.

Koyaanisqatsi seems a more successful film—partly, no

An interview with the director

Godfrey Reggio may be the only film director whose conversation ranges from the Hopi to Thomas Aquinas, from papal encyclicals (especially those of John XXIII) to anarchist theory.

Reggio, forty-eight, was a Christian Brother until 1968, when his political activism forced him out. Afterward, he worked with Santa Fe street gangs, then founded the Southwestern Institute for Regional Education, began learning Hopi lore, and making films.

Reggio says he is "forever grateful" for his fourteen years as a Christian Brother, and regrets neither joining nor leaving the order. To a degree, he says, his filmmaking has been shaped by the experience. "The films are religious if defined a certain way," he says. "Religion tends to act as a mediator between us and God. In general, it makes us much too mediated in our relation to the lifeforce. My films are religious if they allow someone to have contact with it."

Some images from his films have been treated in an annoying pseudoreligious way, Reggio says with embar-

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doubt, because it depicts America with bizarre accuracy, even comic relief. And *Powaqqatsi* has genuine problems. Glass and Reggio seem to run out of ideas. At times—aptly for the second work of a planned trilogy—it felt like the slow movement of a symphony; at others, it was just slow and repetitive.

Reggio also has a hard time visualizing the meaning of his new title. "Life out of balance" is easier to depict than the way in which progress has played a sorcerer with the third world. He has UN studies, encyclicals, and other sources to fall back on, but all are words. The meaning of the title can't be proved visually; worse, the rhetoric of trickle-down and per-capita-income leaps for third-world "miracles" can be used to deny it. Of course, such statistics say nothing about the distribution of wealth, quality of the workplace, or environmental peril. But Reggio can't *film* that answer. Beauty and the depiction of such complex truths are not as close as believers in the religion of art like to claim.

With these limits, *Powaqqatsi* is still magnificent. Glass and Reggio's collaboration raises the idea of the "musical" to philosophy. They also personify another synthesis, experimental merging with mainstream cinema. Backing for their maverick efforts came from Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, and the hustlers Golan and Globus of Cannon Films. Credits include special thanks to Ivan Illich, Jacques Ellul, and Ted Turner. Talk about teamwork! If only the film's reach could exceed this breadth of support and its depth of conceptual grasp. That would be sorcery.

TOM O'BRIEN

rassment—especially the final sequence in *Koyaanisqatsi*, showing a disastrous space launch. "The day after Challenger exploded," Reggio says, "the film was playing in Brazil, where it was very popular. They replayed it on the news for a few weeks, and called me a prophet. But that image is only a metaphor for the whole weight of progress coming down."

Nevertheless, Reggio likes to think of his art as prophetic, and typically mixes Hopi and Christian images to explain himself. "Prophecy isn't linear, not a reading of the future," he says. "The notion of the future as a distinct thing brings in duality. The real future exists in an eternal present. As in the Bible, a prophet only reads the times, like a shaman holding a mirror up."

Reggio, dressed in black with a few grey fringes, reminds one not just of a cleric but Shakespeare's Cassius: slim, ascetic looking, almost six-and-a-half feet, he has a lean and hungry look as he stares out of a Manhattan apartment and scowls at high rises, elevated tramways, and Bloomingdales. It prompts a last jeremiad. "The 1939 World's Fair, the 1851 World's Fair at the Crystal Palace, the unveiling of the Eiffel Tower—all these were symbols of modernity," he says. "World's Fairs used to function as objects of desire. Now we just live in one. The world has become a world's fair." T.O'B.

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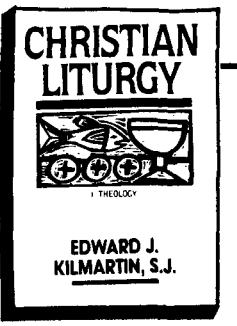

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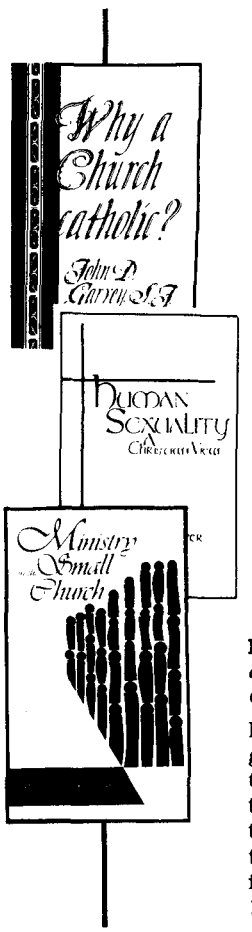

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Philosophy & virture for society's sake

WHOSE JUSTICE? WHICH RATIONALITY?
Alasdair MacIntyre
Notre Dame, $22.95, 410 pp.

Richard J. Bernstein

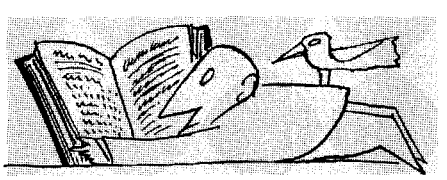
Alasdair MacIntyre is one of the most thought-provoking philosophers of our time. The title of one of his earlier books, *Against the Self-Image of the Age*, captures the spirit of his writings. MacIntyre has been a relentless critic of the ideologies, shibboleths, fragmented, conflicting beliefs and practices that shape our everyday lives. A consistent target of attack has been modern liberalism, which he takes to be a disastrous consequence of the Enlightenment legacy. By "liberalism" MacIntyre does not mean a specific political doctrine but rather a mentality that pervades and corrupts the ways in which we think, act, and feel.

In his more recent and controversial book, *After Virtue* (1981), he argued that a catastrophe occurred with the triumph of the Enlightenment mentality with its false belief in a universal, ahistorical, contextless reason which is presumably possessed by every "autonomous" human individual. The working out of the Enlightenment project—seeking to justify morality by the appeal to abstract reason—has led to chaos and interminable conflicts and disagreements in our moral lives and moral philosophy. We have become rootless impoverished cosmopolitans. Lacking any firm beliefs, we are pushed and pulled by ephemeral manufactured desires and emotions.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre not only sought to expose the rotten foundations of modern liberalism but to reconstruct and rationally vindicate the moral tradition of Aristotelian practical philosophy and the virtues. He argued that this tradition provides a deeper and more coherent understanding of our moral and social lives. Against Enlightenment and liberal prejudices, MacIntyre sought to reclaim what it means to participate in a living argumentative tradition that is rooted in concrete historical practices.

A rational tradition can only be properly understood when we discover its origins, the way in which it develops, the conflicts it engenders, and the way in which subsequent thinkers succeed or fail in addressing and resolving these conflicts. The only way to understand a living, ongoing tradition is by telling the story of its development. Dramatic narrative is what is required to understand a tradition and this is *the* way to develop a viable moral philosophy.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre recognized the need to support his claims with an account of rationality, specifically the practical rationality involved in deciding what we shall do and how we shall act. This is the issue that he confronts in his present book, showing us how different types of practical rationality are intimately related to different understandings of justice. He does this by presenting a dramatic narrative of three traditions: the Aristotelian tradition that emerges from the conflicts of the ancient polis and transforms the Homeric understanding of the virtues; the Augustinian version of Christianity rooted in the New Testament where the concept of will becomes fundamental; and the Scottish tradition that emerged in the seventeenth century and which at its climax of achievement was subverted from within by Hume. MacIntyre's narrative of these three traditions and the ways in which they sometimes overlap and conflict with each other is breathtaking. The erudition, linguistic sensitivity, historical imagination, and rhetorical skill he brings to bear in showing the developmental coherence of these traditions is dazzling and provocative. MacIntyre acknowledges that there are other traditions whose narratives need to be related. He even argues that modern liberalism— despite its own self-understanding—must be understood as a tradition.



The thrust of MacIntyre's project becomes clear when we realize that he denies that there is any neutral universal standpoint from which we can understand and rationally evaluate rival conceptions of rationality and justice. We must always ask: Whose Justice? Which Rationality? And MacIntyre does not hide his own allegiances. He refers to himself as an "Augustinian Christian" and concludes his book by claiming that those who have thought their way through the topics of justice and practical rationality, from the standpoint of Aristotle and Aquinas, "have every reason at least so far to hold that the rationality of their tradition has been confirmed in its encounters with other traditions. . . ."

We would seriously misread MacIntyre if we thought that his primary objective is to tell the narratives of different traditions for their own sake. On the contrary, his explicit aim is to give a "true account of justice and practical rationality." But here we encounter an apparent paradox, of which MacIntyre is fully

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aware. If there is any adequate answer to the questions, "What is rationality?" "What is justice?" *must* it refer to a specific tradition in its concrete historical linguistic detail—and if these traditions conflict with each other and are incompatible, what can it even mean to give a *true* account of justice and rationality? If there is no neutral standpoint from which we can rationally evaluate rival claims of incompatible and even incommensurable traditions, how can we even pretend to give a true account?

It is precisely this problem that has led so many modern thinkers to be suspicious of the truth claims of competing traditions. The conflict of authorities, each claiming for itself "the truth," was one of the main reasons for the Enlightenment attempt to discover an objective standard for evaluation. MacIntyre anticipates the two typical modern responses to his claims. The relativist denies that rational debate and rational choice among rival traditions are possible. The perspectivist claims we cannot speak of the truth or falsity of rival traditions. MacIntyre thinks both these responses are radically mistaken. Indeed they reflect the disastrous Enlightenment prejudice that *either* there is a universal neutral rational standard for evaluating truth claims *or* "anything goes."

MacIntyre argues, on the contrary, that rival traditions each claiming "truth" are not self-enclosed windowless monads. They overlap and crisscross. We can sometimes show why a specific tradition judged by its own standards or even by the standards of a rival tradition is rationally superior. We can sometimes show, as he attempts to do with the Scottish tradition, that it is subverted from within. We can show, as he claims to do with the Thomistic integration of Aristotelianism and Augustinianism, that it can successfully meet the challenges of rival traditions.

Still we may be plagued by the question, "To which tradition should we give our allegiance—an allegiance which does not simply involve intellectual consent but active participation in a distinctive form of life?" MacIntyre acknowledges that there is no easy answer to this question. It depends on who we are and how we understand ourselves. Sometimes when confronted with a coherent, concrete, historical account of a tradition we will experience a shock of recognition. Sometimes in order to enter into serious dialogue with a tradition, nothing less than a conversion is required. But if we think there is any other way of answering questions about rationality and justice except with reference to living argumentative traditions, we are deceiving ourselves.

There are those (I include myself) who may think that, despite MacIntyre's spirited defense, he has not adequately answered the question, "How are we to respond *rationally* to the claims of rival incompatible and incommensurable traditions?" MacIntyre leaves us with a deep unresolved problem. He insists that the concept of truth is timeless. He also tells us that "genuinely to adopt the standpoint of a tradition thereby commits one to its view of what is true and false and, in so committing one, prohibits one from adopting any rival standpoint." But then how can we rationally resolve serious clashes about fundamental truth claims among rival traditions? It is simply not clear how we can escape a situation where rival traditions confront each other and do not share any rational standards for resolving their conflicting truth claims. We seem to be in a double bind.

Nevertheless, anyone interested in moral philosophy, the development of the three traditions so vividly portrayed, or the moral conflicts and discontents of modern life, will be stimulated by this book. MacIntyre has eminently succeeded in doing what is all too rare in our time—he compels us to rethink the most fundamental moral issues that we face as human beings. □

Anne Porter

Farmyard by Moonlight

There must be a farmer asleep under the eaves
Filling his room with the surf-like sound of his breathing.
He takes deep draught of rest,
Gathering all of it in before the morning.
His large weathered hands have fallen open
And in a patch of moonlight on the floor
His heavy wooden shoes are resting too.

Below the torn bright edges of a thatch of cloud
A small moon watches, who has been appointed
To guard this human sleep.
She offers her colorless radiance
To the dark clumsy beast-like presences
Of the stone farmhouse and the thick stone walls,
And sheds her light
Over the lean-to and the ladder,
Over a wheelbarrow holding a few sticks
A glint of water left by the last rain
A thin black sheepdog mysteriously awake
And a slatted gate that answers her with its shadow.

Walt Whitman honored you, Jean-François Millet,
He said you could read the gospel of the earth.
And I thank you myself
For giving me what no one else could give me,
This farm that in Norman Gruchy a hundred years ago
Lay hushed under the moon.
You saved it for us out of that warm life
Which God has hidden somewhere,
And out of your hands and eyes which now are dust.

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INCANDESCENT ALBANY

QUINN'S BOOK
William Kennedy
Viking, $18.95, 273 pp.

Peter A. Quinn

With *Quinn's Book*, William Kennedy adds another installment to his Albany Cycle of novels. The first two, *Legs* and *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*, won critical praise but sank largely unnoticed. The third, *Ironweed*, brought the Cycle—and the cycler—fame, prosperity, and the attention of Hollywood. *Quinn's Book* should add to that renown. It carries the Cycle back in time to its mid-nineteenth-century origins but is neither mere genealogy nor a clone of stories already told.

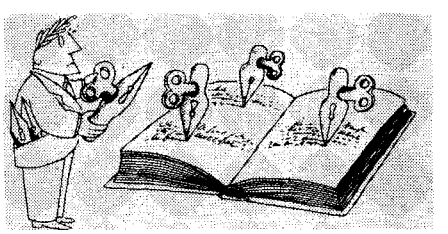
Quinn's Book proceeds with the force of a cyclone: the Cycle as spinning helix. A boat ferrying La Última, one of the world's great courtesans, across the Hudson is crushed by ice. Four of the five occupants drown. A bridge collapses from the weight of spectators to the drowning, with another forty or so fatally dunked. A wall of ice roars down the Hudson and explodes like "a Vesuvius of crystal . . . wounding an unsuspecting half-dozen people, killing two horses and a pregnant cat on the quay, and loosing a tidal wave that swept every object storehoused on the Great Pier."

Maud, La Última's niece and the sole survivor of the incident on the Hudson, is taken by her rescuers to the house of the Staats, an ancient Albany Dutch family whose saga encapsulates much of New York's colonial history. Here the corpse of La Última is resurrected by the love-making of John the Braun, her boatman/rescuer, and what begins as necrophilia ends as revivifying fornication. Meanwhile, much of Albany is burning to the ground, a blaze caused by a washerwoman whose bonnet was set afire by sparks from the burning quay. All this—and more—in the first thirty pages!

Most of these events really happened. Not on the same day, and not in exactly the same way as Daniel Quinn, the book's narrator, recounts them. But the riots, floods, fires, drownings, wars, and conspiracies that fill Quinn's story are all the stuff of history.

Is *Quinn's Book*, then, a historical novel about Albany? Yes, in the same way Joyce's *Ulysses* is a historical novel about Dublin. The purpose is not to fool the reader into thinking he or she is seeing through a glass clearly what is now departed (although Joyce enjoyed creating that effect as one artistic device among many). Instead, it is to play with the mirrors of place and time, to mingle fantasy with fact, the recorded event with the mythical, the improbable with the impossible, piling one atop another until we see reflected in the resulting phantasmagoria the human truths that chronologies can never give us. Surviving the opening rush of catastrophes, Quinn observes, "I did begin to see that violence was the norm of this bellicose world."

Stephen Dedalus tells only a half-truth (at best) when he says, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." As he understood but left unsaid, history is also part wet dream, part mummery, part Punch and Judy. We resist these several truths. We abhor not vacuums but absurdities. We want our history as our textbooks and most historical novels gave (and continue to give) it to us: settled, decorous, purposeful.



Quinn's Book won't let us have it that way, all neat and dignified, hair combed, pants pressed, shoes shined. It will let us look for a moment at this illusion in the form of the uncorrupted corpse of Amos Staats, half-Indian, half-Dutch boy hero of the Revolution, when his coffin is unsealed seventy-odd years after his death. The hero is laid out like history itself: "Amos in his soldier's cap and uniform, arms crossed on his chest, a warrior's medal over his heart, lying as if asleep."

But take notice, *Quinn's Book* warns us: The dead are not dead. Nor have they fallen asleep, awaiting the encore of the Last Judgment. The dead walk among us. The consequences of what they took for truth continue to shape our world; their saintliness or silliness will be forever felt.

Consider the remains of Amos Staats once they are exposed to view: "His face had begun to swell: cheeks, forehead, neck, eyelids all rising as might a loaf of leavening bread, a shocking sight from which we could not take our eyes. And then he exploded . . . upward and outward, his hands and face disappearing beneath a great grayish puff of dust tinged with pale blue, a puff that ascended fully six feet above the coffin and spread over all in a melancholy haze."

Daniel Quinn begins, as we all do, by assuming the meanings of life can be searched out, handled, possessed. He believes those meanings are as available as the past he sees displayed at a patriotic bazaar in Albany during the Civil War, where items such as Myles Standish's pistol, Washington's writing desk, and Madison's cane are on display and, for a dollar, you can take a chance on winning the original hand-written draft of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. This is the past that everyone can be comfortable with. A collection of curios.

Quinn's search also has a metaphysical dimension. The age he lives in sees to that. America at the middle of the last century was incandescent with the bright lights of seers and clairvoyants, with Mormonism, mesmerism, spiritualism, phrenology, and phrenomagnetism—doctrines that fudged the line between the material and the spiritual, and offered a

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view of the eternal reality as near as the mysterious tapping ("as of someone gently rapping") first overheard by the Fox sisters in upstate New York.

The echoes of these spiritual communications surround Quinn. The love of his life, Maud Fallon, whom he pursues from line two of the book until its last words (". . . then Maud and Quinn were at least ready for love.") is a reluctant practitioner of spiritualism, her career as a danseuse interrupted by the thunderous rappings of an insistent spirit. Quinn has visions of his own. He sees his first in the eye of the dead (but-soon-to-be-resurrected) La Última. He is also in possession of an ancient Irish disc ("his Celtic potato plate") that his parents brought over from Ireland and whose secret usefulness he is never able to figure out.

Finally, he doesn't have to. Quinn takes to heart the advice of Will Canaday, the editor of the *Albany Chronicle*: "Remember this, Daniel. The only thing worth fighting for is what is real to the self. Move toward the verification of freedom, and avoid gratuitous absolutes."

Quinn eventually does. He stops trying to find the Ultimate Truths and starts creating his own individual meanings. Searcher becomes progenitor. Daniel has found the craft of words. "The decision I had made so long ago, to live my life according to the word, reached its apogee in the war and then descended into the bathetic dumps of faceless slaughter. Yet in writing about what was worst in the world an unconscionable pang of pleasure dogged my every line. Mine was clearly a life fulfilled by language."

Lucky Quinn. In Maud's arms he will set the Cycle spinning, Quinn begetting Quinn, the artist/father describing as well as creating his own history, "with no expectation of solving the mysteries but content merely to stare at them until they become as beautiful and valuable . . . as Maud now was."

Lucky us to have an artist like William Kennedy to regale and entertain, telling his tales with such wit and verve and in the process creating something so memorable and true.

The luck of the Irish, I suppose. □

NO SHELTER FROM SCORN

THE YELLOW WIND
David Grossman
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $17.95, 216 pp.

Gregory Baum

Here is what it says on the dust cover: "A brilliant and passionate firsthand report on the Palestinian dilemma by Israel's leading young writer—a major best-seller in Israel—one of the most controversial and important works of political reportage in recent memory." This and more is true. David Grossman reveals what life is like in the occupied territories, for Palestinians and for Jews, by recording in a simple, reflective style his own encounters and conversations with ordinary people. His brilliant prose makes readers feel that they have been there, that they know these people and have heard their voices.

This beautiful book is deeply disturbing. What Grossman discovers is that the occupation of the territories is producing a destructive, self-damaging transformation of Palestinians and Israelis. The memory of repeated military violence and the daily humiliations created by the occupation—a humiliation that affects all, from the simple peasants to the successful merchants—has produced in the Palestinians an abiding hatred for Israel and all it stands for. The Israelis are seen as the foreign invaders who govern with the instruments and weaponry of the West.

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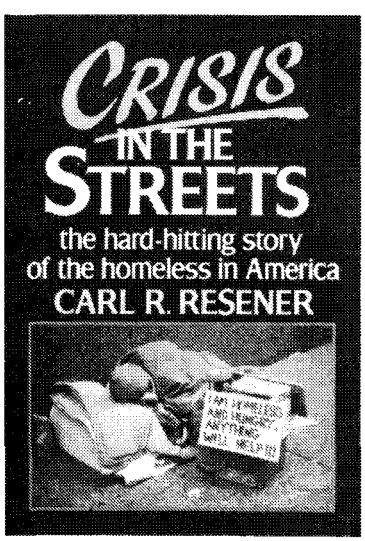

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into conquerors, sometimes unwilling and reluctant conquerors, who impose military rule according to military justice. Grossman shows how Israelis are changed almost against their will. The occupied have power over the occupier. They, the powerless, not only make the army brutal but also gradually turn its beloved Israel into a racist society.

"An Arab woman cleans the stairwell at the housing project in which I live. Her name is Amuna, and she lives in Ramallah. I talk to her from time to time. A three-year-old boy, the son of one of the neighbors, used to seeing her bend over a pail of water, heard us talking and was surprised—I saw it on his face. He asked her name and I told him. Afterward, he asked what we had talked about in Arabic, and I explained. He thought a minute and said, 'Amuna is a little bit a person and a little bit a dog, right?' I asked him why he said that. He explained: 'She is a little bit a dog, because she always walks on all fours. And she is a little bit of a person, because she knows how to talk.'"

David Grossman believes in Israel. That is why he has written this book. But he fears the ongoing occupation of the territories has created a dynamic that leads to the self-destruction of two peoples. This dynamic is "the yellow wind." At certain times, according to an Arab legend, a yellow wind comes from the gates of Hell, a hot and terrible east wind that sets the world afire: and even when people seek shelter from the heat in underground caves, the yellow wind will find its way to them, seek those who have performed cruel and unjust deeds, and suffocate them one by one.

The Palestinians believe that the unjust treatment inflicted on them by the Israeli government is intended to make them want to leave and seek refuge elsewhere. Against this policy the Palestinians have adopted the policy of "sumud," which means hanging on and hanging in, steady and patient resistance. What they fear is that if the present Israeli policy turns out to be unsuccessful, the government will look for a final solution of the Palestinian problem, that is mass expulsion of the entire people. David Grossman allows us to meet Israelis who already dream of this final solution. Will their number grow?

Grossman's conclusion is dark. He fears that the status quo will continue. It is perhaps too painful for Israelis to look reality in the face and recognize the self-destructive dynamism produced by the occupation.

This message has certainly been heard by a number of prominent American and Canadian Jews. They argue that it is time for North American Jews, in solidarity with Israel, to denounce the occupation and support those groups in Israel who stand against the present government's policy. An eloquent and impressive case for this was made in Michael Lerner's editorial "The Occupation: Immoral and Stupid," in the March/April issue of *Tikkun*.

Conscious of the history of Christian anti-Semitism and the church's silence during the Holocaust, many Christians have tended to refrain from criticizing Israel. More than that, the Jewish establishment has often denounced critics of Israeli policies as anti-Semites. Yet today many Jews recognizing the present danger plead with North Americans, be they Jewish or Christian, to defend the human rights of Palestinians and speak out against the occupation in solidarity with Israel's best interests. This, as I see it, is the historical context of David Grossman's moving book. □

GHOSTS OF THE COLONIZED

ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH
Chinua Achebe
Doubleday, $16.95, 216 pp.

John B. Breslin

It has been two decades since Chinua Achebe's last novel *(A Man of the People)*, but neither his pen nor his publisher has been idle, and the complex interplay of politics and literature which has dominated collections of his essays and short stories in the interim has found in *Anthills of the Savannah* a powerful fictional voice. Put most simply, Achebe's constant concern has been with the process of deracination which has taken place in Africa since the beginning of the colonial period. Okonkwo, the tragic hero of *Things Fall Apart*, was the first in a series of Africans undone by the convergence of their own flaws with the alien culture of the white man. In his current novel, he gives us the latest chapter in that saga, a story of three boyhood friends from a local missionary school whose separate careers take them by way of higher education in England back to positions of considerable, though quite unequal power in their native land.

Sam, the graduate of Sandhurst, has been thrust into ultimate power in the wake of a coup. His friends Chris, the Minister of Information, and Iken, poet and editor of the *National Gazette*, watch with amusement and then horror as their chum sheds his initial reluctance to rule and takes on the lineaments of a contemporary Caligula. The efficient young head of the Bureau of State Research carefully nurtures His Excellency's paranoia, and soon the outspoken Ikem loses first his editorship and then his life, precipitating a national crisis. Chris goes into hiding and manages through various ruses to escape into the disaffected North where, simultaneously, he learns of Sam's ouster and meets his own death trying to save a young woman from rape by a soldier drunk on his own sense of absolute power.

At another and deeper level, the novel is about the world of villages, folk wisdom, and peasants these achievers have left behind in their flight to the metropolis. But Achebe is too sophisticated to divide the world neatly between rural virtue and urban corruption; death comes as violently and irrationally in the bush as it does in the capital. Indeed, whatever divide Achebe suggests in the novel has

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as much to do with gender as geography, for it is the women who survive and hold out the possibility of cultural and psychic reintegration.

At the center of the novel stands the figure of Beatrice Nwanyibuife, the daughter of a particularly stern village headmaster. In addition to her rather exalted Christian name, she also bears a native one reflecting her father's disappointment at being given a fifth daughter in a row; translated, "Nwanyibuife" yields the faint praise of "a female is also something." By having her piece together the fratricidal story of three friends, and even more by linking her story to that of Idemili, the great African goddess of water and fertility, Achebe underlines just how important that "something" is. And when all three of the promising young men have been murdered, it is Beatrice who holds the naming ceremony for the daughter of the martyred Ikem and gives her a name that transcends traditional gender stereotypes.

Beatrice experiences her soul as split between the efficient career woman in the ministry office (she, too, has studied in London) and, "like Chielo in the novel, the priestess and prophetess of the Hills and the Caves" (a sly suggestion, by the way, that Beatrice has read *Things Fall Apart*). In this dual role, Beatrice, more than her lover Chris or her brotherly friend Ikem, represents the link between Africa's tribal past and its westernized present. For her, the forging of the link becomes possible through a growing identification with her African sisters who lack her advantages—first with Agatha her house girl and then with the shop girl Elewa, left alone and pregnant after Ikem's death.

For Ikem the moment of reawakening comes at a meeting with his countrymen from the North who have journeyed to the capital to seek help for their drought-stricken province. Turned away by Sam because they failed to support his bid to become president-for-life, the villagers gather at a hotel where one of their elders instructs them and their citified compatriots in the rhetoric of the tribe. His spirited championing of the storyteller's importance takes aim at critics of Ikem the poet and journalist, but it also serves as an *apologia pro vita sua* for Achebe himself:

> It is the story that outlives the sound of war drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story . . . that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort, without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us.

True to form, the old man ends his own speech with a fable about the leopard and the tortoise. Trapped at last, the tortoise begs for time and begins scratching the earth and throwing sand in all directions. When the puzzled leopard asks why he's doing that, he replies: "Because even after I am dead I would want anyone passing by this spot to say, yes, a fellow and his match struggled here." Listening to the old man, Ikem has little idea how close the leopard is, but like the tortoise, he uses what time he has to rally the students at the university to defend their freedoms before it is too late. Chris, too, exits with a flourish despite the apparent absurdity of his murder. Folktale and novel kiss.

If we are to translate Beatrice's and Ikem's rediscoveries into contemporary Western jargon, we might be tempted to say that they find salvation through feminism and narratology! The shock of such a juxtaposition reveals, I think, the dilemma Achebe has forthrightly faced since he began writing in English: How can you express your own identity in the colonizers' tongue without submitting to a still deeper colonization? But Western readers of Achebe have their own challenges to face, represented in an extreme degree by that reductionist interpretation.

There is certainly a feminist core to this novel, but its African accent resists being subsumed into any European or American dialect, just as Achebe's insistence on reproducing Nigerian speech patterns of English, quite alien to Western ears, reminds the reader that BBC (or NBC) English is not the standard for the whole of the Anglophone world. Similar-

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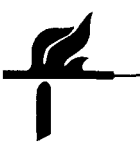

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ly, the novel's insistence on remembering and retelling stories as a way of recapturing one's identity has the paradoxical effect of giving a privileged position to the native oral tale within a quintessentially Western literary genre.

The possibilities for misunderstanding and misinterpretation here are indeed legion, as I have tried to suggest, and they may explain in part Achebe's novelistic silence over the past two decades. But there is another, more positive way to view this peculiar dilemma of translation within the same language. If we allow Achebe to challenge and broaden our understanding of the role of women and the power of story in the contemporary world, then, if I may be permitted to end on a biblical (and wildly optimistic?) note, the frustration of Babel may finally yield here and there at least, before the ecstasy of Pentecost. □

THE WAYS OF THE PILGRIMS

OPEN MIND, OPEN HEART
Thomas Keating
Amity House, $8.95 137 pp.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST
The Liturgy as Spiritual Experience
Thomas Keating
Amity House, $8.95 129 pp.

Lawrence S. Cunningham

Thomas Keating, former abbot of Saint Joseph's monastery in Massachusetts, now resides at their Trappist daughter house in Snowmass, Colorado. Although hardly as well known as Thomas Merton, Abbot Keating, nonetheless, has the reputation of being one of the most influential spiritual masters writing today. He is the founder of Contemplative Outreach and a leading proponent of the Centering Prayer movement. Keating's apostolate, in short, is to recall the contemplative tradition of monasticism in such a way that it can become available to those who live outside the cloister. Both these works under review had their origin in conferences and retreats given to various groups over the last decade.

In *Open Mind, Open Heart* Keating sets forth a historical thesis which both justifies his apostolate and gives warrant for the belief that contemplative prayer is the patrimony of every baptized Christian. Simply stated, Keating argues that for fifteen hundred years of Christianity contemplative prayer was the normal goal of all spirituality. At the end of the sixteenth century, however, there was a decided shift when, largely under the influence of the Jesuits and the *Spiritual Exercises*, discursive meditation became the norm for Christians and contemplative "graces" became the privilege of the very few. This shift came about both as a reaction against quietism and Jansenism and as an acceptance of the post-Cartesian penchant for clear thinking and intellectual rigor. Too often, prayer became mental rumination with an expression of the will to do this or avoid that as the conclusion of a meditation. It was only early in this century, through a recovery of the tradition of John of the Cross, that the older paradigm for contemplative prayer began to be reappropriated.

As an antidote to this overly intellectualized approach to prayer, Keating recommends the practice of "centering prayer" (the phrase is Thomas Merton's), an approach to prayer found, most conspicuously, in the late medieval *Cloud of Unknowing* but with roots that go deep into the Christian spiritual tradition. Very basically, centering prayer consists of utilizing a simple phrase or word (a Christian mantra, if you will) to "center" oneself until the word can be let go in order to rest in the silent presence of God.

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Open Heart, Open Mind is essentially a vade mecum for those who wish to follow this contemplative practice, with separate chapters on the practice itself. A good deal of the book consists of answers to specific questions (set out in italics) which, presumably, come from those who have learned this prayer technique from Keating and other proponents of this method like Basil Pennington, his fellow Cistercian.

The Mystery of Christ, by contrast, is an extended meditation on the liturgical year, its feasts, symbols, and themes. The subtitle of the book provides a fair description of its approach and purpose. Keating is interested in neither historical nor technical theological questions. If there has ever been an example of the older tradition of monastic theology, this book is it. One is reminded of the books of Columba Marmion; it is a rare kind of writing to find today.

His basic intention is to make explicit those ways which, according to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, Christ is truly present: in the believing community; in the proclamation of the Gospel; in the eucharistic presence; in the reception of Communion. As one formed in the monastic round of the *Opus Dei* he is keenly attuned to the changing emphases of the liturgical season and the peculiar demands that those changes bring. His exegesis harkens back to the typological *lectio* of the cloister. The liturgy speaks of Christ and speaks to us as well. As an appendix to the whole there are some brief (alas, too brief) suggestions on how to create a more contemplative atmosphere for non-monastic liturgies.

Both of these books are exemplary volumes for spiritual reading. They attest to a deep faith, a clarity of expression, and a passion to communicate. Having said that, I must hasten to add that the books are only going to be useful for those who are predisposed toward an intense spiritual life and, more importantly, who have the leisure for its pursuit. Many hypothetical "persons in the pew" might rightly object that their days do not have the leisure for the two periods of centering prayer. Modern urban life does not operate on a daily schedule; it follows a weekly pace. We organize our time not according to the round of daily rural chores but by the week of work and what leisure the weekend may afford. Another way of saying this is that the kind of life envisioned by Keating would be difficult for most urban persons and a utopian dream for single parents, working mothers, and so on.

The task that I would set for Keating is the practical but difficult one of connecting the liturgy to the deepening of the spiritual life for the ordinary Catholic. What, in other words, is the bridge between the two volumes under review? Keating tells us that contemplative prayer is a profound preparation for the liturgy and the liturgy, by turn, deepens contemplative prayer. How that circle is joined is not made clear. I could not but think, as I read these two edifying volumes, how our Catholic tradition of spirituality needs to drink deep from the wisdom of Orthodoxy where contemplative prayer and liturgy are more deeply conjoined.

Such criticism should be construed, not as dismissal, but as suggestion. Like a Russian *starets*, Keating has spent years in the silent life of monasticism and now opens his doors to speak to the world. That is a great grace for the church (may his number increase!) because the treasures of the contemplative tradition always enrich, correct, and deepen the life of the church. □

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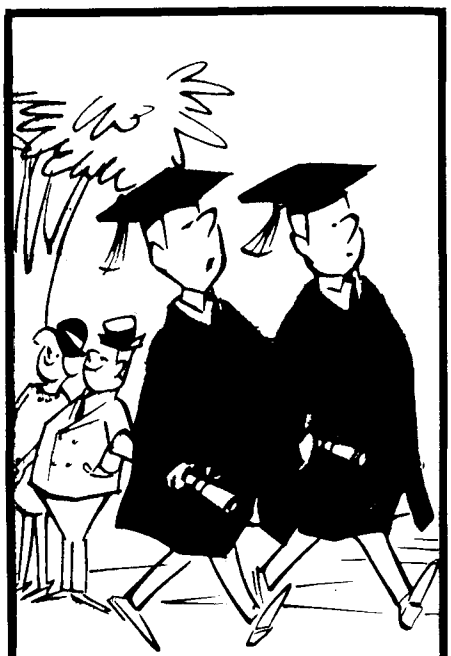

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WAKEFIELD'S CONFESSIONS

RETURNING
A Spiritual Journey
Dan Wakefield
Doubleday, $17.95, 250 pp.

Jane Redmont

Discovering anew the story of the prodigal son, Dan Wakefield is especially moved "by the moment the prodigal son knew it was time to go home and so—in that simple and profound summation—'he came to himself.'" *Returning* is the story of a man "coming to himself." The man is Dan Wakefield, the novelist, journalist, and screenwriter whose works of fiction include *Going All the Way*, *Under the Apple Tree*, and *Starting Over*. *Returning* is subtitled "A Spiritual Journey," but it is also a tale of coming home.

Wakefield's religious autobiography takes us from his Midwestern childhood and adolescence—with tales of Sunday School, Boy Scouts, passion for sports, family tension, and anxiety about masturbation—through college at Columbia as a firmly atheist intellectual, to his adult years as a writer in New York, New England, and Hollywood, during which professional success and warm friendships coexist with emotional turmoil numbed by drugs and alcohol. Wakefield "comes to himself" with a return to Boston, finding a geographical home on Beacon Hill, a community of kindred spirits in the congregation of King's Chapel, and a home for his heart with God.

Even in the bleakest of times, Wakefield has a remarkable sense of place, an unerring intuition about the locations which will make his heart whole and place him more squarely at his own center. It is the author's newfound view of life "as a 'journey' rather than as a battle I was winning or losing" which gives him peace and stability.

Wakefield is candid about the hills and valleys of his life. This candor comes as no surprise from a writer whose fiction about the sexual and emotional coming of age of Midwestern youths frankly paints those years in which, for him, "life was like a close-up, in which every detail was enlarged. All was raw and open, there was nothing you could hide."

In *Returning*, Wakefield is graphic but never self-indulgent. To talk about the spiritual life is to talk about the whole of life; there is not one compartment for sexuality, one for mind, and one for adventure with God. This is no whitewashed, pious essay. Wakefield speaks of the mess of real life and the discovery of a God who is alive in the very midst of the mess.

Wakefield writes from his own experience as a non-fundamentalist Protestant, a white man, an intellectual, rooted in both New England and the Midwest. But whatever our background, *Returning* leads us into our own sense of memory, place, and holiness. Its particularity evokes our own. Wakefield writes not to persuade us that his journey is extraordinary, but to testify that the spiritual life is in fact a common matter, "common" in the sense of "daily," and in the sense that it belongs to us all.

Wakefield's particular vantage point does make a special contribution: we have the Catholic conversion stories of Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, and Emilie Griffin; the Evangelical conversion of Charles Colson; the return to living Judaism of Paul Cowan, but as the list makes clear, few stories of a vital return to the "mainline Protestant" traditions. *Returning* will take its place alongside these other autobiographies, not as "the" ideal model—there is no such thing—but as one of the many strong voices in the rich American chorus of religious experience.

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In the past decade or two, some of the most powerful and inspired voices in this chorus have been those of women, writers of poetry, fiction, essays, autobiography and theology; dozens of names come to mind, among them Alice Walker, Mary Gordon, Ntozake Shange, Carol Christ, Toni Morrison, Susannah Heschel, and Mary Hunt. All these women speak openly of personal religious experience; they wear no masks. Not many successful white, Protestant men outside the fundamentalist fold have taken the same risk. Wakefield does. In our culture, this takes courage.

Wakefield's story will be a comfort to many for yet another reason: he has not, to date, entered a monastery, become an evangelist, or founded a new institution. His return to religion has certainly coincided with radical changes—the abandonment of drugs and alcohol, the daily discipline of prayer, a return to concern about the poor and disenfranchised that he had left behind since writing in the sixties about Spanish Harlem and the civil rights movement. But his spiritual journey consists of living in the world. *Returning* is a profoundly biblical story, for the biblical traditions call us not to escape the flesh, but to live in the flesh with grace and with justice.

Wakefield acknowledges that going to church did not, in fairytale fashion, solve life's problems, and that after his "return" he still had to deal with "the all too common afflictions of the human condition, from broken furnaces to broken hearts." Conversion, according to Dan Wakefield is a "turning" more than a rebirth—"as if I'd been walking in one direction and then, in response to some inner pull, I turned—not even all the way around, but only at what seemed a slightly different angle."

In a recent sermon at King's Chapel, titled "Writing About God," Wakefield told the congregation: "Thinking about God, and worshipping Him (or Her) in church, and in daily private prayer at home, became an essential and natural part of my life as a writer as well." One wonders, after reading *Returning*: Will Wakefield's fiction change? Will there be, in this most public aspect of his life, a visible "turning"? □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 290)

marks about unrelated moral and political issues.

First, he claims that we have become neutral on important moral issues, such as abortion and homosexuality. I doubt that many people are actually neutral on these issues, but I agree that many are unwilling to enforce their views of those issues on others. I think that such tolerance is no bad thing. Those moral issues seem to me basically matters of personal decision, since (arguably in the case of abortion) their effects are largely confined to the individuals making the decisions (as in Carlin's comparative example of religious choice).

Mr. Carlin then says that many people who are "neutral" on personal moral issues "wax very moralistic" when it

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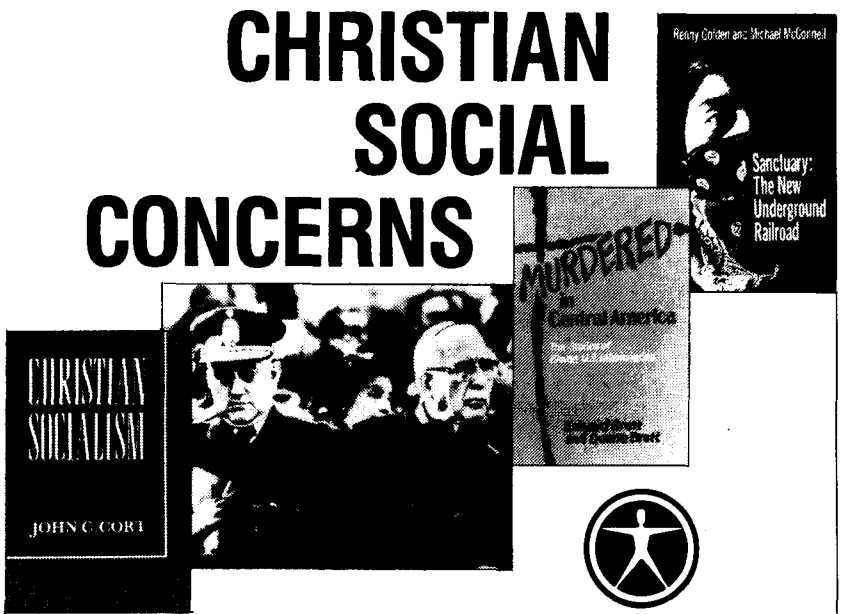

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comes to issues such as environmental protection and nuclear disarmament. However, those issues, though they do have ethical components, are primarily political. That is, they require policy judgments that have effects on many more people than those who make the choices. Thus, it is entirely consistent to feel obliged to take a stand on such political issues, but still to feel that one has no place making personal moral decisions for others.

Mr. Carlin extends his discussion (again, without apparent realization that he's switched topics) to ethical virtues such as honesty and self-discipline, and claims that we are neutral with respect to these virtues as well. I don't think that many people would claim to be neutral on, for instance, honesty; however, I do agree that we've become very lax about insisting on such virtues. I think that we have, for whatever reason, come to tolerate and even expect lapses from ethical behavior. I agree completely with Mr. Carlin on the seriousness of this laxity but let's keep discussion of the problem separate from moral and political questions.

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To the Editors: Thank you for printing such a timely short story ["Death in the Convent," by Joan Sauro, March 25] at the commencement of the church's liturgical celebration of our redemption. I was so immersed in work and family obligations that I didn't realize we were well into Lent and, indeed, into Holy Week itself when I read the article. Suddenly all the profound mystery and glory of the salvation event were epitomized in the life of Sister Eva. She may well be measured a failure, someone to be pitied, by this culture's standards. Yet the eyes of the crucified Christ saw Sister Eva as she truly was and understood. The years of hidden dying brought her to her own tragedy when she entered into the death/resurrection of the Paschal Mystery. Now she can see with that same vision and reach out to each of us when we come to our own moment of salvation.

This poignant story illuminated the reading of the Passion on Good Friday for me. It became an expression of a promise kept to Sister Eva and the reassurance that it would be kept for me also.

BARBARA KUCZYNSKI

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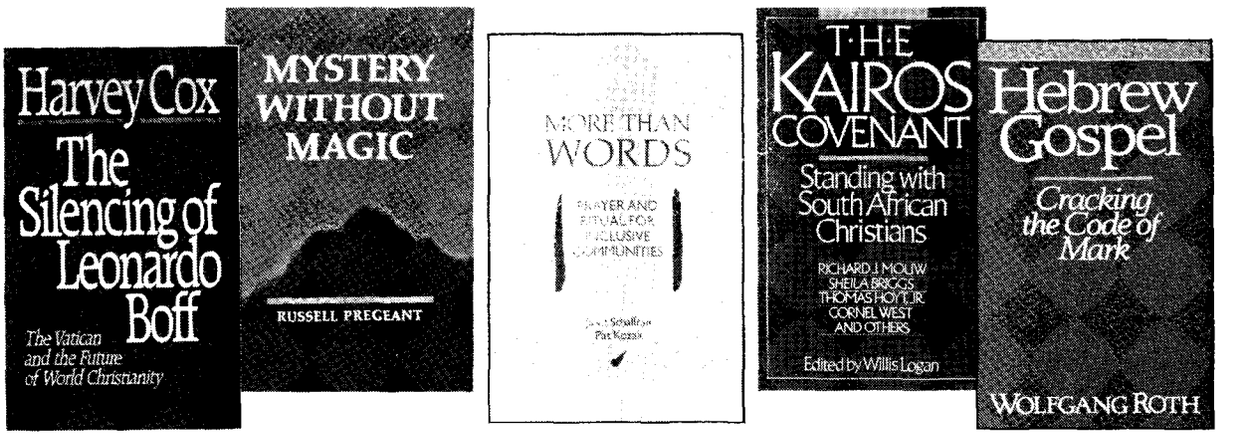

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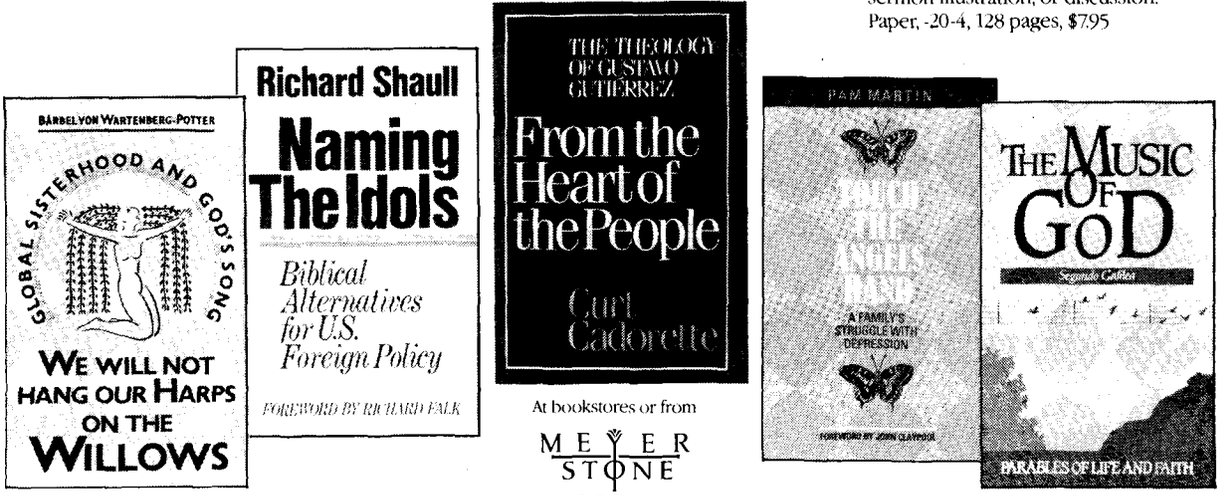
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